



Ore no Imouto ga Konna ni Kawaii Wake ga Nai :
Volume 1

Written by : Tsukasa Fushimi
Illustration by : Kanzaki Hiro

English Translation by NanoDesu Translations

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詩
が
伏見つかさ

Illustration・かどやわらわ
Tsukasa Fushimi



Ore no imouto ga
konnani kawaii
wake ga nai

WHAT THE HELL?
LOOK WHO'S
TALKING!
HOW CAN YOU
TALK ABOUT
OTHER PEOPLE
LIKE THAT, WHEN
YOU'RE DRESSED
LIKE THAT?

TO THINK
YOU TWO
COULD BE
THIS OPEN
WITH
EACH
OTHER...
HEHE.

WHAT
WERE YOU
THINKING,
DRESSING
UP LIKE
THAT?

AS ONE PART OF OUR "LIFE ADVICE" SESSION, I HAD TO
WATCH OVER MY SISTER FROM SUDDENLY START? HOLD ON,
THE HELL DID AN ARGUMENT DOWN, YOU TWO!
HOLD ON! CALM





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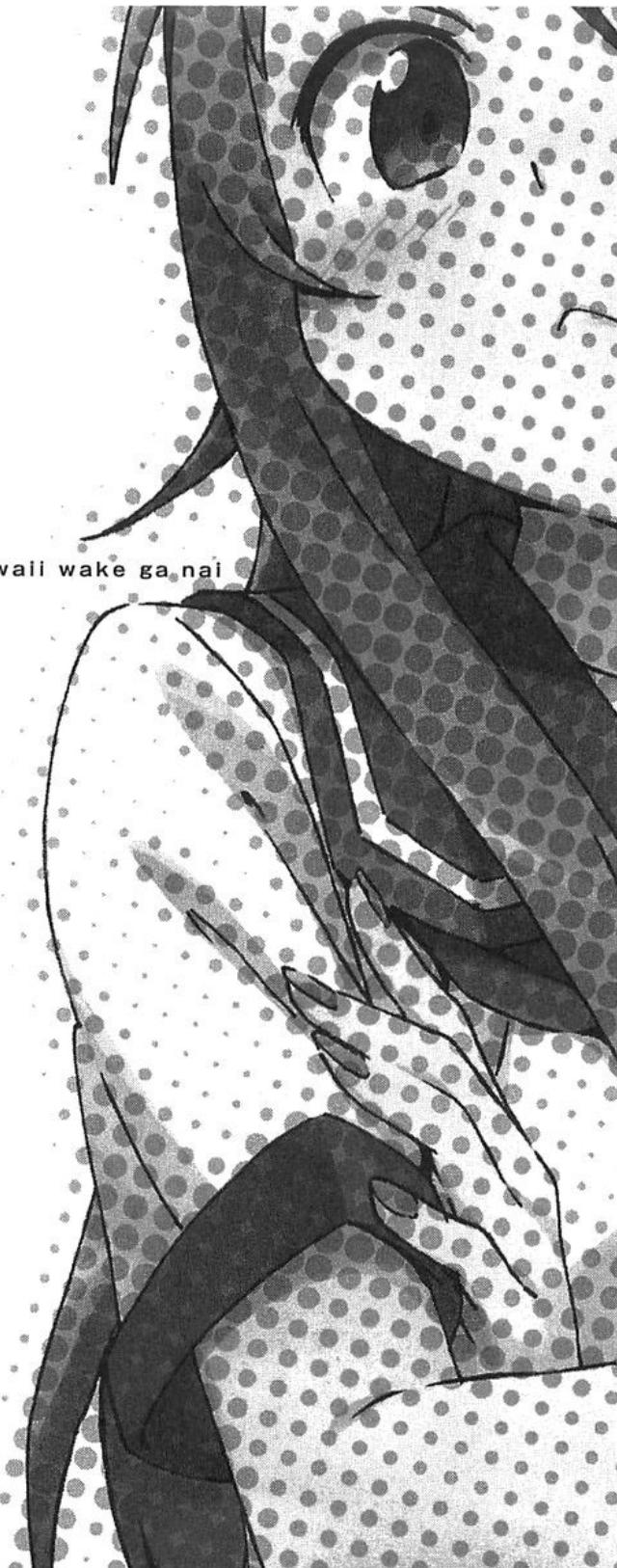
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ore no imouto ga konnani kawaii wake ga nai

第一章



Chapter 1:

Part 1

When I returned home from school, my little sister was on her phone in the living room.

My sister's name is Kousaka Kirino. Fourteen years old. She is currently a student attending a local junior high school.

Her hair is dyed a light brown, and both ears are pierced. Her long fingernails are manicured to a glossy shine. Her face is attractive enough to turn heads just by itself, but she always makes sure to carefully apply her makeup. She carries herself with an air of maturity almost unseen in junior high school. Her frame is tall and slender, but her figure is undoubtedly filled out in all the right places.

If only she also had a knack for singing, she could have easily been a popular idol with the female crowd.

I'm not just saying this because I'm her brother. My little sister is truly refined.

It's also not as if I want to portray her as the perfect sister. My male friends often tell me they're jealous of me for having such a sister, and while I can understand where they're coming from, I really wish they wouldn't joke around like that.

Honestly, I wonder if other people with little sisters might understand my position.

In reality, though, my sister isn't that great. Well, at least to me she isn't.

Take this as an example: in a typical junior high school class, there are usually a few closely knit groups of friends.

Within those groups, one group stands out as the most outstanding. This is the group with lots of remarkable characters – the popular student who gets along with everyone, the genius who's also quite handsome, and the incredibly cute girl, among others.

Even within that outstanding group, one girl still stands out as the most refined, and that girl is my little sister.

She's the kind of person who lives in a different world, who you always hesitate before talking to (after all, she won't really be interested in what you're saying, right?). She is the so-called "highest level girl." You might think that this sounds like a good thing, but she's the kind of girl who doesn't pair well with the average guy. And I am definitely an average guy.

Now, imagine being related to that kind of girl. It shouldn't surprise you that we keep our distance from each other.

So, can you see now? Having such a little sister isn't really that great, is it?

"I'm home."

I decided to go for a rather polite greeting, but not only did she not respond, she didn't even glance in my direction.

Donning her sailor fuku¹ uniform, Kirino was sunk into the sofa, her legs crossed under her very short skirt. She was on her phone with an amused expression, chuckling occasionally.

Certainly, her smile was cute, but such a smile would probably never be directed at me.

"What? Seriously? Why'd he do that? Ahaha, what an idiot."

Ah, but the true idiot is me, for trying to talk to you.

Cursing mentally, I looked inside the refrigerator. I found a bottle of wheat tea, and pouring it into a glass, I downed it in a single gulp. Feeling refreshed, I left the room.

¹ Many girl uniforms in Japanese schools are reminiscent of sailor uniforms.

“Uh-huh, uh-huh... alright. Let me change and I’ll go right away.”

It’s already getting so late, but she’s still going off somewhere?

Well, in any case, it doesn’t concern me. My heart murmuring, I went up the stairs.

My name is Kousaka Kyousuke. I’m seventeen and attend a local high school.

It’s a bit strange talking about myself, but if I had to, I would call myself an extremely normal high school student. I don’t belong to any school clubs, and I have no hobbies or special talents. Well, I do listen to mainstream music, and read some manga and novels, but you can’t exactly go so far as to call those hobbies.

After school, I generally hang around the town with my friends. At home, sometimes I read manga and sometimes I watch TV.

Well, I guess I also study sometimes.

Doesn’t that sound like a really normal high school student? You might think my life is safe and boring, but being “normal” to me is quite an important thing.

“Normal” is matching pace with my surroundings, and keeping firmly attached to the ground.

“Safe” means I don’t involve myself in many dangerous situations.

Thankfully, my grades are decent. If my marks in school continued on like this, I could probably get admission into a relatively good college. Before that, in terms of what I want to do in the future... well, although I’m looking forward to four years of college campus life, it’s probably a good idea to give this stuff some thought now.

One thing I know is that I’m the kind of person who would want a job that doesn’t rush me too much. Chasing your dream sounds nice, but that wouldn’t be

something a “normal” guy would do. That path is filled with dangers, and mistakes lead to costly consequences. Such a life is not fit for me.

Well, I don’t know if I ever had a childhood dream. But if you forced me to think of something... I’d imagine that I would want an absolutely ordinary, inconspicuous and laid back life. That would probably have been my dream.

My home consists of a single house built with two stories. My family includes my sister and me, along with both our parents for a total of four people.

We’re a reasonably well off and wholly unremarkable household.

My room and my sister’s room are both on the second floor. I changed out of my school uniform, and after relaxing in my room for a few minutes went back downstairs. Before starting to study, I wanted to use the restroom. Incidentally, when I go down the stairs into the entryway, on my left hand side there is a door to the living room.

And...

“Oof.”

Near the entrance, I bumped into my sister, who had also changed out of her uniform. There had always been a blind spot here in our house, so it wasn’t unusual to bump into people here.

Don. My left shoulder lightly crashed into Kirino’s chest. The impact itself was not very impressive, but in that instant my sister let go of her bag and its contents spilled onto the floor.

“Ah...”

“Oh, sorry.”

After my simple apology, I tried to reach down to the various cosmetic products that had spilled onto the floor, but...

Pashi. When she saw what I was doing, Kirino quickly swept my hand away with her open palm.

“Wha-“

Looking back up, I was left speechless by the sharp glare I found waiting for me.

My sister began to speak.

“...it’s okay. Don’t touch it.”

Only saying that much, she began to quietly gather her spilled belongings by herself.

Whoa... she gave me a bad feeling there... is it that bad if I touch the stuff she was holding?

Exactly how much did she hate me?

I looked silently down at my sister as she expressionlessly picked up her things.

“.....”

An awkward tension filled the entryway.

My sister turned her back on me, and hurriedly put on her shoes.

“.... I’m off.”

She muttered this like it was an annoying formality, and shut the front door with a *bang*.

...there you have it. This is what my relationship with my sister has become.

Well, it’s not like I was offended or anything.

It’s not as if I really saw us as older brother and younger sister.



Indeed, if a classmate acted the same way towards me, I would think “ahh, this person is *this* kind of person, isn’t he” and wouldn’t try any further.

Laugh if you want at this good-for-nothing brother. Whatever, I don’t care.

And, it’s not like I particularly cared about not being able to talk very much with my little sister.

“... Damn. Since when has it been like this?”

I had the feeling that, even for her, there was once a time when it wasn’t like this at all.

Well, whatever. Whatever. It’s a bit irritating, but whatever. Let’s go back to what we were doing before.

After taking a piss and washing my hands, I dove straight into the sofa in our living room. Picking up one of the weekly magazines scattered about, I lay on my back with my legs crossed.

Ahh... wasn’t I supposed to start studying?

Lying down like that, flipping through and staring intently at the pictures in some action manga, my mood was filled with an extreme emptiness. “This isn’t the time to be doing this!” my brain was yelling at me, but my extreme sluggishness prevented me from listening to reason.

Ahh... dammit. I really don’t want to study.

This type of emptiness is probably pretty common for us high school students.

Shaking my head like a dog that had its face splashed with water, I finally rose to my feet.

Leaving the living room and entering the hallway, I spotted a strange-looking thing.

“Huh?”

It was lying behind the shoebox in our entryway. I hadn’t noticed it before, but now I could see half of a white thin case in the gap between the shoebox and the wall.

Well honestly, my curiosity was just another way to procrastinate. As “I don’t want to study, I don’t want to study,” repeats in my head, my brain is constantly trying to find a reason to keep me from studying.

Even if doing something like just picking up this strange object only really takes a few seconds.

It’s really all the fault of the lazy haze I’m in right now.

I dragged out the object from behind the shoebox, and...

“What the hell is this?” I said, startled. It was definitely not something that I would expect to find in this house.

This is... well... what?

I held the case between my fingers and took a good look at it, but I still wasn’t sure what it was.

It was definitely a DVD case. I knew that much. I’ve seen these types of cases often at video rental stores... well also, “DVD” was clearly written on the case. But, the contents of that case I could make neither heads nor tails of.

I’m sure my facial expression right then was one of puzzled suspicion.

On the DVD cover, there was an outrageous drawing of a girl with huge eyes.

A drawing of a cute girl who looked like she was in elementary school.

“Her hair and eyes are pink...” I muttered to myself calmly, continuing to inspect the case like some detective examining evidence.

It wasn't just the character; the entire DVD package had plenty of white and pink.

Well, that much is fine. But the problem is...

"What's with this get up?"

This small girl was wrapped in a costume that was quite revealing. Her outfit was a swimsuit... made of bandages... or something... it was a get up that made me want to yell "Dress properly please!" From that strange bandage-like outfit sprung what looked like rocket boosters, and the girl was holding onto a trail of stars (☆ <-- like this) and flying through the air.

But also, she had a ridiculously big mechanical-like staff (or a spear, maybe?) that she was lifting easily with one hand.

It was something that would put even Ryofu Housen² to shame, and was obviously designed for fighting. Maybe she uses it to mow down enemies, or to smash through foes, or maybe she uses it for something much worse.

It looked like a truly dangerous thing.

Moving on...

In the upper half of the package, what was probably the title was written in a very round font.

"Star... dust, witch... meru, ru? First time... limited edition? What's this?"

² Military general during the Chinese Han Dynasty.

I could go on and on picking out small details, but in short, this was obviously an anime. I might have been initially confused because I hadn't seen something like this in a long time.

"Then... why is something like this here?"

You could almost see the question mark hovering over my head. I held this "Stardust ☆ Witch Meruru" thing with both hands and stood still in the entryway. Suddenly, the front door to the house swiftly opened right in front of me.

"I'm home... what's wrong Kyousuke? Why are you rolled up like that in the entryway?"

"Don't worry about it, mom. I just wanted a change of pace."

Too close! I thought my social life was going down the toilet!

But she wasn't mistaken. The instant the door opened, I fell to the floor and rolled up, hiding what I was holding.

Phew... I made it just in time, didn't I?

Although I don't know the culprit, maybe this was a trap set for me. If someone witnessed me holding something like this, I would be the laughingstock of the family³.

I could already imagine Kirino's disdainful stare, as if she was looking at a pile of garbage.

My mother, holding a few bags of groceries, looked down at me sympathetically.

"You know, I heard from one of the neighbors. Mental counseling for students is pretty popular nowadays."

"W-wait. Don't be rash. I'm not insane. It's just... today I studied a bit too much, I guess."

"What a lie. There's no way *you* would stress yourself out so much over studying, is there?"

Ah, even my mother is saying such things to me. Have more confidence in your own son, will you?

"It's not like that. My grades are plenty decent, you know?"

"But that's because of Manami-chan, right? Having such a talented childhood friend tutoring you, how exactly can you be patting yourself on the back like that? When have you ever liked studying by yourself?"

"..."

Damn, she hit the bulls-eye with that one, and I couldn't respond. After all, up to five minutes ago I was lounging around reading manga.

³ He actually says "I would be denounced in family court," but that sounds a bit strange in English.

Crawling along the floor like a worm, I hid “Stardust Witch Meruru” underneath my shirt and tried to escape from that place. Behind my retreating back, my mother called out.

“Kyousuke? I don’t mind that much, but in the future, please try not to read your H-books in the entryway.”

Ahh, how depressing. Then again, it’s to be expected that my mother would guess such things by how strangely I was acting. After all, she had once cleaned my room and accidentally unearthed my secret collection.

But this time, the thing I was hiding did not have such kind of meaning.

Carefully letting my mother walk past, I held the DVD to my chest like a rugby player would hold a ball, and ran up the stairs. Flying into my room, I shut the door, and finally let out a sigh.

“Phew....”

I slowly took the article out from underneath my shirt, and held it carefully in my right hand. Using my left hand, I wiped the cold sweat off my face.

Mission complete. Really, though, I’m used to doing things like this. I won’t go into the reasons, but I believe that any healthy junior high student would be able to sympathize.

“... I ended bringing it up here, didn’t I...?”

Squinting at this “Stardust Witch Meruru” thing in my hands, I grumbled.

Well, it can’t be helped. If, in the middle of my excuses for not studying, I had suddenly gone “Hey, here’s this thing I’ve also been hiding from you,” then I’m sure that would have attracted unwanted interest.

My examination studying time having been cut short by such unavoidable circumstances, I began my inspection of the thing in earnest.

My room is six tatami⁴ large. There's a bed and a desk. Reference books and manga (and etc.) are stored on my bookshelves. And I also have a closet.

My carpet was colored pea green, and my window curtains were blue. On my wall there hung a Japanese-looking calendar my mother had gotten from the local neighborhood association, but otherwise my walls were devoid of posters and the like.

Other than that, aside from a small mini-computer, I had nothing – no personal computer, no television, and no games.

Pretty uninteresting, right? I stand by my rule of living a perfectly normal life, and my everyday habits show this quite clearly.

Also, I had already pretty much given up hiding my ero books, so they were being stored in cardboard boxes under my bed. I had once begged my mother, kowtowing to her on the floor, to never clean under my bed. But, I have no reason to believe that she would honor such an agreement, and even if she were checking my collection every so often, I had no way of knowing.

Ugh, I don't even want to think about it! My pride really wouldn't be able to handle that.

But at least my collection was not that risqué, so that even if my parents discovered my books this wouldn't lead to a family crisis. That's the best defense plan as far as I can tell.

I wonder how people without their own private room try to hide things like this...

But, in any case, I've never really thought of anything but leaving my door open. I guess it would be pretty spoiled of me, to be troubled by not having a lock on my door.

For a few seconds, I mulled over these thoughts.

⁴ One tatami is around 1 meter by 2 meters. So his room is around 120 square feet.

Then, I sat on the bed and crossed my legs. I took the DVD case in one hand, and rested my chin in the other hand.

“The more I look at it, the more out of place this thing seems...”

Bathed in the light of a fluorescent lamp, the Stardust Witch’s smile sparkled. Wielding such an extremely destructive weapon while smiling – depending on how you looked at it, it was almost terrifying.

“Hm...”

Well then... who exactly does this belong to?

In turn, I went through all the other people in the Kousaka household. As I thought, there was nobody who I would expect to own such a thing as this “Stardust Witch Meruru.”

And, I don’t remember ever seeing this DVD being played on the television in our living room. (Of course, at this moment, I didn’t realize that you could also view DVDs on your PC).

So... what do I make of this? Why was something like this lying there?

While I continued my musings, I opened up the case with a *click*.

“Wha-?!”

I was more puzzled than ever. Much more intensely puzzled than when I had been just looking at the cover.

In short, there was no “Stardust Witch Meruru” DVD inside the DVD case. In its place, there was some other DVD.

... I guess this kind of stuff happens a lot. For example, after listening to CDs on my mini-computer, putting each CD back into their matching case is such a bother that I often end up shuffling them around.

But then, I soon have no idea what CD is in which case, and chaos ensues.

This is probably what the owner of the “Stardust Witch Meruru” DVD did; the owner probably put in the DVD, not really caring whether it was the right DVD or not.

Ahh, I understand now. This stuff happens often, after all.

But... uhh...

Why is the title of this DVD “Loving my Little Sister”⁵? What the hell are you trying to get someone to do?

And what’s with this quaint little “R-18”⁶ label?

“... Calm down!”

Beads of cold sweat gathered on my forehead, and my breathing became ragged.

This was bad. This was really bad. I thought about what could have happened in that little scene back there with my mother if she had found this.

If I was discovered with this, I would probably have to kill myself. Is this really some sort of trick someone’s trying to play on me?

I might not deal with this kind of thing often, but my instincts were letting off loud warning bells in my head. What was this dark aura emitting from this title...?! Even without the R18 label, the title itself is plenty! The more I thought about it, the more I knew that this was something I definitely could not continue to hold onto...

“Kyousuke... are you studying properly?”

⁵ “Imouto to Koi Shiyuu”.

⁶ A label reserved for 18+ explicit content.

“Ahhhhhhhhh!”⁷

Giving out an agonizing cry, I dove under my futon.

Peeking out towards the door, I saw my mom looking dumbfounded at my strange behavior.

“... Sorry. Is this a bad time?”

“Don’t worry about it mom. It was just speaking practice... But please, please, knock next time.”

“Alright, sorry. I’ll be sure to do that from now on.”

With a forced smile and a knowing expression, my mother left and shut the door.

No good... it's a good thing I managed to hide this thing at the last second, but my mother definitely has the wrong idea now... dammit.

Today has been such a terrible day... and all the blame is on this thing.

Still under my futon covers, I stared at the puzzling DVD case.

“Dammit...”

At this rate, I have to find the owner; I won't be able to live in peace until I do that.

I burned with angry determination to find the culprit.

But... there's too much I don't know.

That is, there's too much I don't know about the owner of this bizarre DVD. The owner of this "Stardust Witch Meruru" case, in which there was this very suspiciously titled "Loving my Little Sister" thing.

If I had to make a prediction, I'd probably guess that whoever owned "Stardust Witch Meruru" was the same person who owned "Loving my Little Sister."

And, considering I discovered this article behind our family's shoebox, there was a high probability that the owner was someone in my family – either me, my sister, my mother, or my father.

Of course, it's not as if outside people never went in and out of our house, so I can't completely reject the possibility that someone outside our family is the owner.

But seriously... who would deliberately come to our house and drop "Loving my Little Sister" in a "Stardust Witch Meruru" case behind our shoebox? I can't even imagine how that would happen.

"Er..."

Well, for the time being, I feel it would be useless to consider the possibility of an outside owner. For now, let's try to wring the identity of the culprit out from inside the family.

Me, my sister, my mother, and my father... out of these four people, one is supposedly the culprit. Objectively speaking, which one is the most suspicious...? "Stardust Witch Meruru" and "Loving my Little Sister (18+)," who would be the most likely owner of these things...?

"Well, the answer would be me, and that's annoying."

No, no, no. Of course it's not me⁸. But certainly, I guess that I would be the most likely suspect. Man, saying that about myself makes me kind of sad.

⁸ It pains me not to use proper English grammar here ("I" instead of "me") but using "I" would sound too stuffy. Alright, this was a silly Translator's Note. Shut up.

But that thing obviously isn't mine. Because I really am not that interested in anime. There are a few people in my class who would talk about anime, but I rarely talked with them.

But, I mean, I could say the same for all the other members of my family... Concluding that, I held my head under my arms, troubled.

Ok. Well, it can't be my mother, right? And I don't think my technophobe dad can even use a DVD player. Plus, just to imagine seeing that hardheaded man merrily watching anime gives me the chills. And my sister... well, she was the first one I had excluded. About five years ago, she may have watched stuff like anime, but lately she's only been into mainstream dramas and music programs, right?

Such childish anime is definitely quite far from Kirino's hobbies and interests.

No matter what, I can't possibly imagine her going so far as buying this "Stardust Witch Meruru" DVD and then watching it. And, as for "Loving my Little Sister," even thinking she would do that would be repulsive. So, could it possibly be Kirino? The modern-day Junior high school girl? Just today even, there's no mistaking that she went out to hang out with her friends...

"I give up. I'm beyond stumped."

My ship of reason had finally run aground. As I thought, the culprit couldn't be in my family, but if I expand the sphere of suspicion to include people outside of the household, there would be so many people to consider that I would surely make no progress.

This is useless. I guess I really am not cut out to be a detective.

Well then, what now? This is so annoying... maybe I should just give up?

No... as I thought, I can't erase this from my mind. I will definitely find the person responsible.

It was strange, but I had become unusually determined. The usual me would have stopped this investigation right now, and then would have taken a nap until

dinner. And, if I had done that, the peaceful life that I had before now would have continued.

But, that didn't happen. With purpose, I had decided not to give up the search. Of course, at this point I didn't know why I felt this way, but for better or for worse, I was determined now to be the decider of my own fate.

In this case, I decided to go and tread on a huge landmine.

Chapter 1:

Part 2

In my house, dinner happened at seven o'clock sharp. This was because my father always came home from work around that time. If you weren't at the dinner table at seven, then you weren't going to be eating dinner there at all that day.

It was six forty-five. Scratching my head, I left my room and went down the stairs. But, I suddenly stopped mid-descent. Right beneath my eyes, I saw the figure of Kirino around the entryway.

Ahh, so she came back.

Now that I think about it, Kirino's curfew was 6:30PM. Setting aside whether that time was too early or too late, it seemed that she honored her curfew. Well, I guess that even though she looks like a high school student, for the time being she definitely is still in junior high.

Today, Kirino had on a black and white striped T-shirt, as well as a black something that looked like a mix between shorts and a skirt. I don't really know, but it looked like something of the Sesi brand. If she were called a fashion model, then everyone would probably believe it.

...pretty cute, isn't she?

But I didn't really want to approach her.

Because she seemed to dislike me, it was probably best that we keep our distance from each other. But no matter how often I repeated that to myself, it wasn't like we could stop being siblings.

I just have to deal with it, I guess.

So I waited there on the stairs for her to go to the dinner.

"...Hm?"

But this was quite weird. The living room door was right next to her, but she did not head towards the living room, and instead just stood in the entryway looking dazed.

...What exactly is she doing?

Well, I didn't want to look like an idiot just standing there, so I descended the rest of the stairs.

I stood in front of the living room door, my hand on the knob.

"..."

Suddenly, I turned my head.

"...Hey. Something wrong?"

"...Huh?"

Whoa, what an intense stare.

...Damn. Knowing this type of thing would happen, why did I have to open my mouth?

Am I an idiot?

"Tch. It's nothing."

Clicking my tongue, I turned the living room door knob forcefully.

On the dining room table was tonight's dinner of curry and miso soup. This room where we gathered to have our meals functioned as a living room, a dining room, and a kitchen, so it had no dividers and was very spacious.

My sister and I sat down in empty seats, directly across from mother and father.

The newscaster on the television chattered away about overseas exports as well as other current events.

My father sipped his miso soup silently. After taking a bath, he had changed into casual clothes, so the stern atmosphere was amplified by his Yakuza-like appearance. But the truth was quite the opposite; he was working as a police officer.

On the other side, my mother was chewing some pickled vegetables. From appearances, she really gave the impression of a housewife. Honestly, Kirino did not take after her at all.

My little sister was very silent. In this family, my sister was fundamentally unsociable. Silently eating her meal like that, I thought she really looked like my father. Especially with her sharp glare...

Incidentally, I've been told that I take more after my mother.

My family's dining room was also a typical, normal family table, and for that I was grateful.

Eating my curry silently, I looked for an opening to enact my plan.

It was, of course, a plan to identify the owner of the DVD.

...Although, it isn't as complicated as I make it sound. It was a simple plan with no twists and turns.

In a word, because pure logic would not get me anywhere at that point, now that all the suspects were gathered in one place, I could fish for the culprit a bit. And then, there was the opportunity I was looking for.

Draining my clam miso soup, I spoke to no-one in particular.

"I'm going to the convenience store after dinner. Does anybody need anything?"

“Oh? Then please buy me some of the new Haagen Daaz ice cream. The seasonal one.”

“Alright.”

After this conversation with my mother, I nonchalantly started talking again.

“Oh right. One of my friends has recently gotten into some girl’s anime. Umm... I think it was Stardust something, or something like that.”

“What’s this, so suddenly?”

At my bait, the first response I got came again from my mother. Could it really be that...

“Well it’s nothing, just that he thought it was interesting and recommended it. I was wondering if I should give it a try...”

“No. That sounds like something an *otaku* would do, doesn’t it? Come on, I learned about this kind of thing on TV. It would be bad if you turned into something like that, wouldn’t it? Don’t you think so, dear?”¹

The conversation had been turned to my father, and he answered very plainly without changing his expression at all.

“Do not go deliberately looking for bad influences.”

Hm, as I thought, that’s what he thinks about this. There’s no reason to say bad things about something you don’t know much about, but honestly this stuff generally doesn’t leave a good impression, does it? For me, I don’t really care what hobbies other people choose to take up. After all, it has nothing to do with me.

¹ An otaku in this context is someone who is into anime and manga. Also, Kyousuke’s mom actually refers to his father as “dad,” which is pretty common in Japanese households when one parent is talking to the other, but just sounds strange in English.

But, objecting to my parent's words would be really annoying, so I just responded with a noncommittal "uh-huh." Well, I guess my mother is not the culprit after all. She never faltered at all at my comments.

I'm speaking, of course, about the owner of the DVD. And, from the beginning I had already ruled out my father. He did not even know how to play the DVD, so he could not possibly be the owner.

So then... by process of elimination... the only one left is...

I discretely glanced at Kirino out of my peripheral vision.

"..."

Kirino was intensely biting her lip. She had stiffened with all her might, to the point where the tips of the chopsticks she was holding were trembling. ...Wha-? ...Could this mean...

"...Kirino?"

My mother called softly to Kirino upon detecting her unease.

"...Thanks for the meal."

Kirino, looking quite annoyed, rose from the table and briskly walked out of the room.

She closed the door with a loud *bang!* I heard the *dan, dan, dan, dan, dan* of her footsteps going up the stairs.

The three of us left at the table were dumbfounded.

"...What's gotten into her today?"

"Wh... who knows..." I appropriately answered to my obviously dumbfounded mother. But honestly, I had no idea what had just happened either.

What did she get angry at? Something was said in the previous exchange between my parents and me that really made her angry. Maybe she was the real culprit, and realized exactly what I was doing, but that would be all the more stranger.

Normally, Kirino would never get so agitated and be so easily caught red-handed by me. So, why did this happen? Kirino, I don't understand at all.

"...Hmm..."

But... Kirino's behavior was anything but usual... I also have to take into account that she definitely reacted to my comments.

Of course, this wasn't definitive proof that she was the culprit, but at the very least, this heightened my suspicions that the DVD belonged to a family member...

But could it possibly be, that the "Stardust Witch Meruru" DVD I picked up in the entry way belongs to...

...my little sister?

"Dear, after dinner please call Kirino down."

My father's grim voice echoed heavily around the room. Ahh, he's getting mad. Oh well, whatever.

Chapter 1:

Part 3

The DVD's owner was Kirino. Certainly, if I assumed that... a lot of things would make sense.

The time she dropped the item was probably the time she bumped into me earlier in the evening. At that time, when the contents of her bag spilled out, this thing may have fallen into the crevice between the shoebox and the wall.

And then, she went out and realized that this item was missing.

And, this also explains why she seemed like she was looking for something in the entryway right before dinner.

Continuing along these lines, if my theory about the mismatched DVDs was correct, then Kirino meant to bring "Stardust Witch Meruru" with her and not "Loving my Little Sister."

... But still. I can't even begin to imagine why she had to bring this with her when she went out. I thought that she was just going to hang out with friends, and there's no reason for a girl who's going to a mixer like that to bring an anime DVD, is there? I mean, she definitely was going to meet with her friends...

"...Hm."

I just don't understand. For one, until this day I could not imagine Kirino ever having to do with children's anime. Was I wrong? Is the owner really Kirino? That's impossible, isn't it?

It's nice that I came up with this theory of Kirino's guilt, but so far in my heart I was still less than half convinced.

Well, for now, let's see if we can't set a little trap.

"Thanks for the meal."

Having finished my meal, I left the dining room table. I stopped by my room to grab my wallet.

Stopping in front of my sister's room, in a forced tone, I spoke.

"Alriiight. Time to go to the convenience store."

I have no acting ability, do I? Well, whatever. It's not like I thought this was going to work. Instead of a trap, this was turning into some clownish sideshow.

With a *dan, dan, dan*, I went down the stairs. With a *bang*, I left the house and shut the door.

Leaving the house, I walked towards the convenience store. Rounding the corner, however, instead of going towards the convenience store, I walked along a different path that led me to the back of the house.

What exactly was I planning to do? Well, I guess I was trying to think from the perspective of the culprit. If Kirino was really the culprit, then she probably already knew that I had her DVD.

So, then... if I were in Kirino's position, what would I do?

Well, she would definitely want to take the DVD when I'm not looking, and then feign innocence... that's the only thing she could do.

Kirino was obviously in a strange mood earlier. She lost her cool. And in that state... when I left she may have finally reached the end of her patience and started looking for her DVD in my room. I mean, the chances of this ploy working were pretty low, but I wanted to try something rather simple.

"Ahh, as I expected, it's not good is it... or wait... could it be..."

As I muttered to myself, I went in through the kitchen door at the back of the house, and sneaked quietly up the stairs.

And then, I forcefully threw open the door to my room.

Oh!¹

“.....Hey..... What do you think you’re doing?”

“.....Ah!.....”

Ehhhh?! Really?! She was really here!

Okay, okay, calm down.

In the middle of the room, Kirino was crawling on all fours. At my entrance, she paled and swiftly turned her head in my direction.

She looked frightened. But, again, that stare as if she were looking at garbage pierced my heart.

“... I asked you, what are you doing?”

“... It’s nothing. Don’t worry about it,” Kirino snarled, with her behind still facing me. She seemed nervous, and her breathing was uneven.

“... How is it fine? Freely walking into another person’s room and looking around... What would you think if the same thing happened to you?”

And also, of all places, wasn’t where she was sticking her hand where I kept all my H-books?

Instilling my words with a sense of inexpressible anger, I had spoken calmly.

“.....”

Without speaking, Kirino turned away. Maybe it was from anger, but she began to blush. Then, without a word, she slowly stood up and walked this way.

“Out of my way.”

¹ He says “Gi!” Doesn’t sound right in English.

“No. Answer my question---- what were you doing here?”

“Out of my way!”

“Don’t play dumb. You were looking for this, weren’t you?”

While she glared intensely at me at point blank range, with a racing heart, I slowly took out the “Stardust Witch Meruru” DVD case which I had hidden under my shirt. Kirino’s response was quite dramatic.

“That’s...?!?!”

“Oo.” Kirino threw an intensely threatening glare my way, and reached out for the case, but I skillfully evaded her hand.

With an excessive look of triumph on my face, I beat my palm against the back of the DVD case.

“Hm. So this really was yours, wasn’t it?”

“... No, there’s no way that could be mine.”

She spoke in a clearly displeased voice and obviously did not want to continue this conversation. Hey, hey, at least make an attempt to make your words and actions consistent, then.

“It isn’t yours? I picked this up in the entryway this evening. Isn’t it something you dropped when you bumped into me?”

“Definitely wrong.... It’s not mine.... th... that kind of.... childish anime... there’s no reason I’d watch something like that.”

She’s completely set on denying it, isn’t she? We’re not going to get anywhere like this.

“Well, if you weren’t looking for this, what exactly were you doing in my room?”

“Well, that is... that is...!!”

“That’s what? What is it?”

Upon my prodding, Kirino once again fell into silence.

“.....”

Her shoulders shaking pitifully, she bit her lip and cast her eyes downwards.

It was obvious that my questioning had left her incredibly embarrassed.

For example, imagine if someone you hated came up to you and said “Hey, this H-book, it’s yours, right? Hehe.” That would be horrendous; it would be so embarrassing that you’d want to die.

“.....tch.....”

Her glare was cruel², and her cold hostility struck me.

... Dammit. Why does she have to glare at me so hatefully?

Crap... I’m looking like more of an idiot by the second. Even though I really didn’t care that much about this at all. Why did I decide to start acting so unpleasantly towards her?

Ahh, I can’t anymore. As if I could continue acting this way.

“Hey.”

I casually held out the DVD case to Kirino. My sister looked up at me with hatred gleaming in her eyes.

“This is something important, isn’t it? I’ll return it, so please accept it.”

“B-but, it’s not mi-“

² They use an idiom here, “oya no kataki de mo miru you” which basically translates to “with excessive hatred.”

“Then take it and throw it away.”

“Wha-?”

Kirino looked up at me with a puzzled expression.

What’s with that look? It wasn’t like there was any reason I should continue teasing her like this. I was only curious who this DVD belonged to, and now I know that. Why would I want to keep going back and forth like this with her? I didn’t reveal these thoughts to Kirino, but I chose my next words to ease the tension.

“My bad. It was a misunderstanding. I know now that this doesn’t belong to you. I don’t know who it belongs to, but it somehow found its way to me. I’m apologizing, and then please, won’t you throw this away for me?”

After I had made that attempt to calm the situation down, Kirino suddenly spoke.

“... Uh... I- It’s OK. Whatever.”

With that, she took the DVD case from me. I stepped to the side, and Kirino opened my door and walked out of my room. I advanced into the center of my room.

“Phew...”

Geez, that was so unexpected! How many years has it been since I’ve spoken with my sister like this?

I’m so tiiired... falling into my bed with a *thud*, I stared up at the ceiling.

And then, my sister’s voice appeared, even though I had thought she had left the room long ago.

“... He-hey?”

“Huh?”

She's still here? How annoying, can't you just leave?

When I turned my eyes on her, I saw that she was shyly looking at me³. She wore a charming⁴ facial expression that I would have never expected her to normally have. Wh-what is this? ... What's going on?

"What?" I asked, feeling a bit uneasy.

".....Do you..... Do you think it's strange?"

"What is?"

"That is.... Okay, this is just hypothetical. ... It's like this. If I.... really owned that DVD... I'm asking you, is that strange?"

.....tch.

"Not really? It's not that strange, is it?" I answered, clicking my tongue mentally.

I wanted to get her out of my room as quickly as possible, and if I didn't answer like that she would just get angry again. ... Geez, why did she still want to fight over this? Didn't I return the DVD to her to protect her pride and avoid conflict? After all, her clumsiness is what caused this problem in the first place... She should be thanking me, why is she still so resentful?

"You... really think that? Really?"

"Yeah. Whatever hobbies you might have, I definitely wouldn't make fun of you for it."

Because it really has nothing to do with me.

"Really really?"

³ She was looking at him "with a feeling like she was taking fluttering peeks at someone."

⁴ He actually uses the adjective "shushou," which means admirable... which I interpret to mean "shy" or "charming" in this context.

“You’re stubborn, aren’t you? Yes, really. Believe me please.”

I chose my words a bit carelessly, but somehow or other Kirino seemed to be satisfied at my response.

“..... I see..... Alright.”

Nodding her head repetitively, and holding “Stardust Witch Meruru” with almost religious fervor, she ran out of the room. Why did this scene evoke such a sense of nostalgia in me? I feel like something like this has happened in the past long ago... but I’ve forgotten what.

“... She could have at least shut the door.”

Grumbling, I collapsed into my bed, facing skyward.

Chapter 1:

Part 4

The next two days were extremely uneventful. Kirino's relationship with me returned to normal; we didn't talk, our eyes never met, and we generally kept our distance from each other as if we were strangers. I had caught a glimpse of an unexpected side of my sister, but I didn't really plan to do anything in particular in regards to that, so I decided to just forget about it.

So, why am I still so interested in what my sister is doing?

But, even though that's true, I'm not going to just go digging around for more secrets. That would be really tedious.

But...

It was late at night.

I was sleeping peacefully, when with a *smack*, I felt a sharp pain on my cheek.

“...Wha?!”

What a terrible wakeup call. Something really knocked into my cheek hard.

W-what is it?! A burglar?! Terrified, I hurriedly opened my eyes.

“...”

So bright. It seemed like the lights had been turned on. I felt a heaviness on my stomach, but it didn't seem like my arms or legs were restricted. Pretty sloppy for a burglar, isn't it... hey!

“Y-You.”

Ascertaining the identity of my attacker, I opened my eyes wide. Due to the unexpected night attack, I could hear my heart beating.

“Be quiet.”

The attacker’s identity was revealed to be Kirino, who was in her pajamas. My upper half sprang up. She was right over me on all fours. Her face, which bore none of its usual makeup, closed in on me.

“... Wha... It’s you? What exactly do you-“

“I told you to be quiet. How late do you think it is?” Kirino said threateningly in response to my accusatory question.

‘How late do you think it is?’ – shouldn’t that be what I should be asking?

... But now, for me... it’s late in the night, I’m on my own bed, my sister is sprawled over me, and we’re staring at each other at point blank range. What in the world is this situation? Taken out of context, it seemed like a scene straight out of a romantic comedy, but my heart was bursting with an entirely different feeling.

“F..... for now, get off my bed....” I said while trying to steady my breathing. With a clearly indignant expression, Kirino obliged.

If this were another girl, I would have also been really bewildered (but probably for a different reason). But with my sister sprawled on top of me, the only thing that really bothered me was her weight. No matter how I looked at her, it never really registered that Kirino was part of the opposite sex.

Guys who have a younger sister should understand this feeling.

Sigh...

Rubbing my temples with my fingers, I sighed and then began talking.

“So? What do you want with me?”

“... I have something I want to talk about, so come with me.”



Geez, why do you look so angry? I'm the one who should be angry, with you slapping me on the cheek like that. But, I'll be a nice guy and entertain you right now.

"You need to talk? At this time?"

"Yes."

"I'm reaaaaaaaally sleepy though... Is this something that really can't wait until tomorrow?"

I said this in an obviously annoyed tone, but Kirino did not nod her head.

Instead, she looked at me with an expression that said "Are you an idiot?"

"Tomorrow is no good. It has to be now."

"Why?"

"...Because."

Alright, alright. She didn't give me a reason. She also was obviously not giving up. Geez, this girl is so spoiled.

Even though these remarks flew through my head, I honestly just really wanted to go back to sleep.... But I had already woken up, so I guess I'll play along. This is really annoying, but I'll respond.

"Where do you want me to go?"

"...To my room."

She said this while giving me an extremely fierce glare ¹, and began to pull on my sleeve.

Finally giving up resisting, I resigned myself to following her.

¹ See Note 2, Volume 1, Chapter 1-3.

“See, you should come... come with me.”

Seriously, what's going on?

Chapter 1:

Part 5

My sister's room was right next to mine. My dad had given her this room last spring, when she entered into Junior high school. This room was once an old ragged Japanese-style room, but it had been refurbished into a Western-style room. And, up to now, I had never once entered it.

I had always thought that I would never see the insides of this room, but of all things, I'm being invited inside in the dead of night. If you had told me this morning that this would happen, I would definitely have not believed you. Even now, I didn't really believe that this was actually happening and wasn't some huge joke.

"... It's okay. Come in."

"... Alright."

At Kirino's word of approval, I took my first step ever into my sister's room. I didn't really feel it was that big of a deal though. A strange sugary smell permeated the air.

...Hm. Isn't this bigger than my room?

This room was probably around 8 tatami large¹. There was a bed, a closet, a desk, bookshelf, full length mirror, and a CD rack, among other things.

The interior design of the room was pretty much the same as that of mine. The entire room was also covered in a reddish coloring.

But she did have a personal computer on a desk, which I didn't have.

It wasn't a room with too much personality, but in its relative modernity, it matched the image of Kirino I had always held.

¹ As explained before, one tatami is equal to around 20 square feet.

“... What exactly are you staring at?”

“I’m not really looking at anything.”

Seriously? Even though she invited me in, she’s still saying stuff like that?

Kirino sat quietly on her bed, and pointed at the floor.

“Sit.”

She said that so naturally too. Isn’t this situation looking a bit too much like a judge with a criminal?

“Hey, at least give me a cushion to sit on, won’t you?”

“.....”

Kirino scowled, obviously displeased, and threw a cat cushion to me.

Thankful, I sat on the cushion, cross-legged.

... Seriously, she looks really annoyed that I’m touching something that belongs to her. Does she think I have cooties² or something? Are all girls this age like this? Ahh, that would be terrible.

“So?”

I casually rested my chin in my hands. Kirino frowned, and was obviously agitated about something. Soon, she took a deep breath and murmured something.

“...ave something to...”

“Come again?”

Her voice was so low. I couldn’t hear it at all. At my request for clarification, Kirino’s eyes hardened.

² He says “germs,” but this is probably more appropriate.

“... Advice. I need advice.”

Whoa, am I hearing this correctly? Thinking my ears were playing tricks on me, I asked again.

“What did you say?”

“..... I need some life advice.”

“.....”

For what I’m sure was a long time, I was silent, dumbfounded. In my silence, my eyes were blinking rapidly.

Wait... what? Of all things, my sister, who hates me and sees me as some garbage bug, is facing me and asking me what? For advice? However I think about it, this seems like a dream. At this point, I wouldn’t even be surprised if Godzilla started attacking the city outside our window.

Somehow or other, I managed to speak out of my parched throat.

“You need... life advice... from me?”

“Yes.”

Kirino gave a definitive nod. Seriously, is this real?

“... Is this about what you said before?”

“About what?”

“You know... uhh... that time when you asked me ‘would it be weird if I owned something like this.’ That talk.”

Geez, I’m so inarticulate. I sounded really awkward.

“That time... could you mean, when you asked me to throw that thing away?”

“... Yeah.”

Why are we talking about that here?

“Ahh, yeah, I said that,” I responded, confused. “So what?”

“Umm... so you... really wouldn’t make fun of me?”

Geez... should I even answer that? I wanted to say.

Kirino looked at me with a doubtful expression. I responded.

“Stop repeating yourself so much. I already told you, I definitely wouldn’t make fun of you.”

After all, your hobbies are your hobbies, and I really don’t care. Did she really call me all the way over here just to ask me that one more time?

“You de-definitely wouldn’t? Really really?”

“Definitely not. Really really really.”

“If you’re lying... I’ll never forgive you.”

“Whatever, do what you want.”

Get to the point, won’t you? What are you saying?

After my weary explanation, Kirino stood up, as if she made up her mind, and walked to her book case.

Hmm? What is she trying to do?

Confused, I watched as Kirino went up and pulled one of her two bookcases off the wall. It didn’t look too heavy, but she walked over and spilled the case’s contents onto the bed.

And now, one of the bookcases had disappeared from the walls, leaving just a large blank space.

“He... hey..... what... are you trying to do?”

Not answering my question, Kirino went up to the remaining bookshelf (having already dumped half her books on the bed), and began pushing on its side with her shoulder. Facing the empty gap on the wall, she started to apply pressure to the bookcase.

Little by little, the bulky bookcase began to slide. And then, behind the bookcase, a Japanese-style sliding screen³ appeared. A secret hiding place.

“Whoa...”

Kirino let out a breath, and then began to speak.

“... When I started going to junior high, and got my own room... this room was converted from a Japanese-style room into a Western-style room, right? I’m not too sure, but this is one of the remains of the old room... I think. It was hidden by the bookcase, so even I didn’t know it was here until last year when I found it while cleaning the room.”

“Oh?...”

It’s just like dad to be so stingy. He probably thought that it would be OK since the problem spot was being covered by a bookcase.

“So... could it be that the advice you need is about what’s behind that door?”

Kirino nodded. She put a hand on the sliding door, but did not look like she was trying to open it at all.

“.....”

Hesitating with an unsure expression on her face, Kirino stared at me intently.

³ The technical term for it is a “fusama.” Google image search it if you must.

From the flow of the conversation, I tried with my limited imagination to guess what could be behind the sliding door. Whatever was behind there, it was also probably the reason for her hesitation.

... Needs life advice, huh? Why from me, of all people?

Well, certainly, I did tell her that I wouldn't make fun of her regardless of what hobbies she might have...

"Hm..."

I tried to imagine what I would do in Kirino's place.

Well... if we're talking about life advice, then there are really two main types, right?

First, it could be the most common case, where you consult with someone you can rely on.

In this case, you have some problem but you can't figure out what to do, so you want to think about a solution with someone else together.

And then, there's the case where you consult with a third party who doesn't know anything about the situation.

In this case, the third party can't give good advice from the onset, so he has to sit and listen to the situation for a bit before giving an opinion.

But, for Kirino, I was certainly not someone she felt like she could depend on and confide in. Definitely not.

... Right?

But if what's bothering Kirino is what I imagine it to be, I can understand that it's something that would be difficult to talk about with other people.

She must be afraid of tarnishing her own image. It's not a situation in which she can freely choose who to confide in.

At this point, there really was only one person in the world that Kirino could go to for honest advice.

I already had found out her secret, and I was impartial and didn't care. That one person was me.

Huh. So it's like that, is it? Now that I was fairly convinced I had figured the general situation out, I wanted to just get it over with and go back to sleep. So, I spoke.

"Don't worry. Whatever you bring out from there, I won't make fun of you, and if you want me to keep it secret, I won't tell anybody... alright?"

At my carefully chosen words, Kirino nodded once again.

"... It's a secret, OK?"

Murmuring that to reassure herself, Kirino opened the forbidden door.

*Whoosh.*⁴

Plop.

"... Wha? Something... fell out?"

Before I went for a detailed look at the contents of the hidden compartment, I moved instinctively and picked up the fallen object.

It was another DVD case...

The title was "Loving my Little Sister ~ Little Sister Maker EX Vol.4."

"COUGH COUGH COUGH"

⁴ The text reads "gara," which is an onomatopoeia that doesn't translate well to English.

I almost choked over my surprise.

Th- this again?! Now that I think about it, she didn't only own that anime, but things like this too!

I was dumbfounded. Also, what the hell is with this half naked girl looking embarrassed and covering herself on the cover?! Such an indecent cover illustration is beyond my imagination! And, what's more, this is only part of an entire series?!

"Wh.... What in the world... is this... ?"

"Ah. That originally came out for the PS2, but it was ported over to the PC and renamed. It's really amazing, but it's a bit old and the content is a bit difficult, so I wouldn't recommend it for beginners."

That wasn't what I was asking! And also what do you mean by "beginner"? Are you a "pro" or something? Seriously a "pro"?

Dammit, there are too many comments I wanted to make here, and with all my strength I don't think I can keep them in.

Wh- what exactly am I trying to start?

What kind of strange business did I get myself caught in this time? Somebody tell me!

The revelation of this "Loving my Little Sister" hit me right in the gut, and I felt groggy. My sister didn't really notice though.

"Ugh..."

Breaking out into a cold sweat, I raised my head and took a peek into that forbidden abyss that was thrown wide open.

At first glance, the interior of the compartment looked like just any ordinary closet. It was split up into an upper and lower compartment, and was poorly lit.

But, the inside of the compartment was stacked densely with a large number of goods.

My eyes first landed on a tall stack of boxes in the upper compartment.

“These... boxes are....?”

“These? These are PC game boxes.”

Kirino responded with a hint of pride in her voice, and with a bit of effort took a few of the boxes and placed them in front of me.

These boxes were mostly from the “Little Sister Maker EX” series, with titles including “Super Sister-in-Law,” “Playing with My Sisters,” “Tengen Toppa 12 Sisters,” “Ultimate Weapon Little Sister,” and things of that type.

There was a lot I wanted to say, but I didn’t want to choose the wrong words and land myself in a terrifying situation. For now, let me start with a relatively safe question.

“Why... are these boxes so big?”

“I don’t know either. But that’s how they are,” Kirino said, as if this were one of the world’s unsolved mysteries.

I don’t understand... I don’t understand... I don’t understand anything at all...

Gulp... Straining to keep in dangerous comments that were threatening to come out from my mouth, I averted my gaze and turned towards the lower shelf in the compartment.

There, also, stood a line of huge boxes.

These boxes were even bigger than the PC game boxes, and there were a variety of them. On many of them there were illustrations of girls, several which had a metallic shine to them.

“These... this stuff... what is it?”

“Anime DVD boxes. All the boxes here are deluxe editions.”

“DVD Boxes? Deluxe editions?”

It was a bit shameful, but I parroted her words back to her.

“Yes. These complete editions include extra story content, have bonus disks, special edition booklets, and other extras are included. ... Fufu, incredible, isn’t it?”

“And, it’s the same with that... Stardust Witch... whatever?”

“Yeah.”

For some reason, I felt Kirino getting excited.

Being able to reveal her prized collection like this made her this happy? She’s even smiling at me, her hated brother. But, for some reason, I still didn’t feel that satisfied about this.

For now, something was bothering me.

“All of this... wasn’t it very expensive?”

“Hm? Well, relatively, I guess. Let’s see... this was 41,790 yen⁵, you see? And this one was 55,000 yen, see? And then, umm, this one was...”

“So expensive!!! What do you mean, relatively?!?!?!”

“Really? ... I mean, it costs around the same as one or two sets of clothing.”

⁵ Around \$550 at late 2011 exchange rates (of 77 yen per dollar). This is the last time I will convert a yen amount into USD in this translation.

“Where in the world are you getting all that money?! You’re a junior high school student, aren’t you?! Why is it that you’re only fourteen, and you already have so little restraint in spending money?!”

I regretted this right after I said it.

... Crap. I might have stepped on a landmine. I really didn’t want to hear how she was going to respond...

Ignoring my obvious discomfort, Kirino quickly responded.

“Where am I getting the money... isn’t it obvious I have a job?”

“I... I see...”

Hm... job... a job? I guess it’s OK if that’s true...

...no, wait wait wait! That’s not good at all, is it?!

Giving Kirino a penetrating stare, I continued my questioning.

“J... Job, you said?”

“Yeah.”

“... What job? Where did you get it?”

“Ahh, right, I never explained that. I’m modeling for a magazine.”

“Ma- magazine? Model? Like... a gravure idol⁶ or something?”

“... Completely off. Are your ears broken or something? I said I was a mo-de-l. For magazine subscribers.”

⁶ From Wiki: “a Japanese female model who primarily models on magazines, especially men's magazines, photobooks or DVDs. Gravure idols, in most cases, emphasize their sexual attractiveness and often model in swimsuits or lingerie.”

My chest hurt at her scornful expression. I never really had made a distinction between a model and a gravure idol, but it seems that what I said was completely off the mark.

Whether or not she noticed my confusion, Kirino took a magazine out from her bookcase, and tossed it to me.

It was some kind of teen magazine. On a white background, the title was flashily displayed in shiny font. On the cover, there were also various statements predicting the latest trends.

“.....”

Flipping quickly through the book, here and there I caught glimpses of the familiar figure of my sister. I don't really know much about this kind of stuff, but it seemed like she was posing while wearing the latest in fashion.

Hmm. I had always said that she looked like a model, but she seriously was one.

I really shouldn't care what she does with her time, but why am I a little annoyed by this? I don't really know why, but without thinking, I let loose a snide remark.

“Doesn't posing like this make your back hurt?”

“You're an idiot.”

I thought I saw a hint of disappointment within her scornful stare. It must have been my imagination.

At her suddenly downcast eyes, I felt the mood of the room darken. I tried to smooth things over.

“.... I mean... it's... pretty c-cute, isn't it?”

What am I saying? ... But it was also the truth.

“... And I mean, this is a pretty popular magazine right? Even I’ve heard of it. You’re pretty amazing.”

“Hmph, not really. It’s not that big of a deal, this magazine.”

But at my words of praise, she seemed happy. She didn’t appear to be as annoyed as she put on.

Sensing that the tension had broken, I continued where I left off.

“So... how much do you make?”

“Umm... That would be...”⁷

When I heard her answer, I dropped my shoulders, heartbroken.

... Hey hey.... However you look at it, that’s a bit too much to be giving to a kid.

“And I mean, every day I have to make sure to practice and keep up my appeal too – that’s also part of the job.”

“Keh... well said, I guess.”

But man... I’ll bet that the readers of this magazine would not believe that this cute, stylish model who’s posing for them uses her pay to buy things like “Loving my Little Sister” or “Playing with my Sisters.”

Or, should I say, if her fans knew something like this, they would probably faint.

As I reflected on the unfairness in the world, I tried to peek into the bottom of the hidden compartment.

But, Kirino stood there with her legs straight and arms stretched out, standing in my way.

⁷ We never read how much Kirino makes, but it is understood that she does tell Kyousuke – it’s just not written in the novel.

“... Ah, I won’t let you see any more than this today.”

“Why?”

Well, it’s not like I wanted to see more. I just thought that she wouldn’t let me go until she had shown me everything.

After taking one glance at the hidden compartment’s bottom, I was met with a fierce stare.

Stop looking at me like I’m garbage, won’t you?

“I... still don’t trust you. We won’t go any further today.”

“What?”

What was this? What exactly was she saying? She made it sound like this was just the tip of the iceberg, that there was a lot of stuff worse than this. Ehh... seriously? Is that true?

“Umm... there’s some stuff in here that’s... a bit embarrassing... so.... yeah... not today.”

“.... I- I see...”

Whaaa? My sister, who was almost proud to show me “Loving my Little Sister,” is hesitating and telling me that there are embarrassing things in there... what kind of unthinkable, terrifying things were these? Suddenly shivering and quieting down, I fell forward onto all fours.

“H- How could that be?”

“Wh- what do you mean ‘how’?”

What in the world am I saying? If anybody knows, please tell me.

When I didn’t respond, Kirino started a bit bashfully.

“So... what are... your impressions? You saw. That’s... my hobby.”

“...Uhh... my... impressions?Umm, I’m surprised.”

“That’s it?”

“... Even if you say ‘that’s it?’... I can’t help it can I? I really am very surprised... I don’t really have any other impressions about it.”

At my intentionally conciliatory remarks, Kirino frowned and murmured wearily.

“... As I thought. Having this kind of stuff... is strange, isn’t it?”

“... No, it’s really not...”

Whether it was strange or not... that wasn’t really the issue.

... So this was the “life advice” that Kirino wanted?

Leaving that aside, will she let me go back to my room soon? I want to sleep and just forget about all this.

I really wanted to get away from this place as soon as possible, so I said what I felt my sister wanted to hear.

“I already told you. Whatever hobbies you might have, I definitely won’t make fun of you. Isn’t that enough? Whatever hobbies you want to have, that’s completely up to you. It’s not like you’re causing problems for anyone, and nobody has a right to complain when you’re using your own money to pay for it.”

“... I know, right?!... Haha... sometimes you can say good things too!”

Alrighty then, is she satisfied? So, please let me go back to my room now.

With that, I began to lift myself up, but I suddenly changed my mind and sat back down.

The truth is, for quite a while I've been being really patient and keeping in all the interjections⁸ I wanted to throw her way.

If I made a poor remark, she might answer in a horrifying way, and so if I could I wanted to get through this without making any snide remarks. But I couldn't keep it in anymore.

It was like the world was hurling me instructions to "Hurry up! Make a comment! Make a comment!" Of course, this was probably my imagination.

"Uhh..."

Alright... should I make a remark now? Should I really? Am I prepared? Am I ready to deal with it, to not lose my cool if she responds in a horrible way?

"Kirino, we've talked through all of it, but I still have one thing I would like to ask you."

"Huh? Gross. What are you being so formal?"

Bastard, why are you speaking like that to your brother who listened and reaffirmed your choice of hobby?

At this point though, I got a feeling that things wouldn't turn as ugly as I thought.

Collecting my wits with a breath, I started speaking.

"Your collection... Why do you only have little sister eroge?"⁹

"....."

⁸ The term he uses here (and frequently after) is tsukkomi, which is basically an interjection you make when another party says something stupid. It's usually not meant as a mean-spirited thing, and often is meant to be funny. For more information, see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manzai>. There is really no good way to translate this perfectly into English, so I'm trying my best. Bear with it.

⁹ Eroge is short for erotic game. Basically, a pornographic video game.

Hey, hey... why is she being so quiet? ... Say something, won't you?

"What... do you think?"

"Ahh... I wonder..."

Wait wait wait. Why is she blushing?

Why is she crawling towards me on all fours?

Wait a second, wait a second... stop that, seriously! It's not like I'm into stuff like that...

Sensing danger, as if I wasn't able to stand, I began to scoot backwards.

"... Why are you running away?"

"I'm not running away."

"Liar. You're running away."

"That's because you... ah..."

Crap. My back hit the wall, and I couldn't retreat any further.

Looking for a way to stand up and run from the room, I hurriedly looked around the room. Doing this quite slowly, I became more and more cornered.

"....."

Kirino looked like she was thinking hard, and had made a decision.

With a serious look, she stared right into my eyes. I felt paralyzed, and could not move at all. Neither of us looked away, and a tense atmosphere permeated the room.

Continuing to crawl on all fours, Kirino seemed like she was going to crawl on top of me...

And then she thrust the “Loving my Little Sister” package in front of my nose.

“Wha-?”

I was surprised at this unexpected development. Ignoring my puzzlement, Kirino’s attitude did a complete 360. She began to speak as if slightly entranced.

“Looking at this package... don’t you think it looks good?”

“... Wh-what are you saying?”

I don’t understand what she’s getting at. I can’t even count how many times I’ve said “I don’t understand” since setting foot in this room, but this time I was especially confused.

“Come oonn!”¹⁰

She seemed truly confused, as if she wanted to say “Seriously, you don’t get it?”

“... It’s really cute, isn’t it?”

What is? Be more specific, won’t you?¹¹

At this time, I probably looked pretty doubtful.

I didn’t think that asking her anything at this point would get me a useful response, so I tried to read between the lines of her words and guess what she meant in my mind.

“.....”

¹⁰ She says “Daakaraaa!” which is a statement of exasperation. “Come on!” is the closest I could come to it in English.

¹¹ He actually thinks “You omitted the subject in your sentence.” Which just sounds really stuffy in English.

There were two clues. First, there was the package she had thrust in front of my face. And then, there was her abrupt description of this package as “really cute.”

If I thought about it normally, there was really only one answer... but, would that answer be strange? Or not? ... Not being able to come to a definitive conclusion, I timidly asked.

“So you mean... that is... uhh... I might be wrong but... you like ‘little sisters’? A-and so, you have a lot of those kinds of games?”

“Yeah.”

C- correct answer... She’s vigorously nodding... But why does she look so proud of herself?

... Although, it would be nice if we could talk to each other like this usually.

These thoughts were flying through my head when Kirino began talking without prompt.

“It’s really cute, isn’t it? Umm, I’ll give you an example. Because the main character in a galge¹² is usually a guy, the little sister will call you things like “oniichan,” “onii,” “aniki,” “niikun,”¹³ to show her affection for you, yeah? And these ‘special nicknames’ all match her type and personality. And that’s... really adorable.”

“A- ah... That’s great.”

I responded the only way I could.Geez, she really seems excited about all this.

And also, the only things you call me are rude things like “hey” and “you.” What’s up with that? That’s not adorable at all; rather, it’s pretty irritating.

¹² A type of game (usually pornographic) in which the objective is generally to woo and date a girl out of a number of choices.

¹³ Various spins on the word “older brother,” of different levels of formality.

Not noticing my silence in the slightest, Kirino continued to show me the “Loving my Little Sister” package, and pointed at an illustration of one of the girls.

“In this game... this girl is my favorite one.”

The girl she was pointing to was short and seemed very timid. Her black hair was tied in twin pigtails, and she had on a shy, bashful expression.

“As I thought, twin pigtails and black hair are musts. These types of tidy, obedient girls, you just really want to protect them, and you just really want to hug them tightly... hehe... it’s great, isn’t it?”

But your hair is light brown. You wear an incredibly short skirt, cross your legs, and sit with your ass in the air and talk on your phone. All that stuff you said now, it’s impossible for you to become that type of girl, isn’t it?

Well, whatever. That’s another matter.

“... I see.”

My little sister likes little sisters. That’s why she’s collecting these things.

I understood that much. But my curiosity was far from sated. Rather, my curiosity was just getting bigger.

With a strained face, I asked my next question.

“B-but... why?”

“Huh?”

“I mean, why do you like little sisters? I’m not saying it’s wrong... but the games you’re playing, they’re usually meant for guys right? And, what’s more, isn’t it illegal for you to be buying 18+ games? This just doesn’t seem to match with your image at all. Why would you like, I mean, like things like that? Is there a motive, or reason, or something, for this?”

“That’s... that is...”

After hearing my question, Kirino was clearly dismayed. She blinked as if her face were splashed with cold water, and her gaze darted confusedly around the room. It didn’t feel exactly like she was just struggling for words. Waiting for a while like that, I heard Kirino speak.

“I... I don’t know!”

Her eyes shut tightly, her face dyed a brilliant red, Kirino seemed just like a small child.

“Huh?” I responded. Kirino held her chest with both hands, and, embarrassed, began speaking.

“....Um, that is.... That is... I... I don’t understand it... myself...”

... Whoa. What is this, so suddenly... has she been possessed by a demon or something?

Where did the usual hateful Kirino go off to?

Looking so embarrassed is so unlike Kirino (in fact, it looks cute), and I was dumbfounded.

“You don’t know, you say... but it’s your own hobby, isn’t it?”

“B-but! I can’t help it.... I really don’t understand it myself... at some point, I just... started liking this stuff...”

That sentence ending ¹⁴ ... hey hey, that’s so out of character for you.

“I... probably saw some anime in the window of a store or something... and that got me into anime.”

¹⁴ Kirino ends her statement with “da mon,” which is sort of a cutesy shy way of ending sentences. This does not translate at all into English, but this is what Kyousuke refers to in the next sentence.

Kirino, just like the little sister characters she liked, was getting more timid.

She uneasily looked up at me.

“..... I also..... know that this isn’t a normal hobby for a girl. So up to now I haven’t told anybody..... I always kept it hidden. But... in the end... it’s really something that I like... I think when I was on the Internet, I accidentally Googled¹⁵ this stuff.... And then I downloaded a trial version, and while I was playing that... ahhh... I got really into it and knew I had to buy more.”

In the end, it was like this, was it...?

I looked at the high pile of little sister games, scrutinizing them.

... She’s fallen into the devious game producer’s trap, hasn’t she?

“Th-this type of cute illustration... it almost drives me mad...”

That’s the illustrator’s fault, isn’t it?

And, anyways, why the hell am I sitting here in the dead of night, listening to my sister explain how she became an otaku?

Is there any brother in the world who has done this before?

Kirino continued.

“There were so many times I told myself that this couldn’t go on, that I should stop... but, no matter what I tried I couldn’t stop... whenever I opened up an Internet browser, and I go on news sites¹⁶ for all the latest news, they always try to make me buy stuff, you know? ... oo, and also on cosplay and Akiba blogs...”¹⁷

“Well, I mean... I don’t understand this well at all but... the news sites? Can’t you just not look at them?”

¹⁵ Apparently there is actually a Japanese proper verb for “to Google.” Ahahahaha.

¹⁶ She cites Hatena Antenna, which is a Japanese site.

¹⁷ Akiba is shortened from Akihabara, a portion of Tokyo that is known for electronics and anime goods. Cosplay is... ok, if you don’t know what cosplay is, why the hell are you reading this light novel?

“..... If I could do that I wouldn’t be having these problems in the first place...”

At my light interjection, Kirino looked very disheartened.

Hey hey... who is this person in front of me? This cute little sister in front of me is definitely not the Kirino I’ve come to know.

In front of me, Kirino clunked down and looked up at me with tear-filled eyes.

“... So... So, what should I do?”

“.....”

I could say “Do whatever you want to do,” but...

Frankly, if I wanted to be honest, I would respond “How would I know?” but as expected I couldn’t say those words to my sister who was obviously depending on me. Whatever the case may be, I couldn’t say that.

I understand. She chose to come to me for advice, but it’s not because I’m the kind of brother who she can look up to and depend on. I had already decided that coming from me, someone that Kirino did not care about, nothing I could say could actually harm her.

It was a rather frivolous and lighthearted way of thinking about things.

But... even then, Kirino came to me and spilled her worries to me. I mean, there wasn’t a shred of deep affection in it, but even then, just by relying on me a bit, isn’t that at least something? And now, the one person who can become her strength and support, that one person is me, right?

... So, there’s no use fighting it, then.

I closed my eyes and accepted the situation. Kirino’s predicament was really something.

“Maybe... I really should just tell mom and dad...”

“Isn’t it obvious that wouldn’t work?! Don’t even think about it!! If that would have worked, do you honestly think you would be in this awkward situation now?!”

Whoa, I shouldn’t act so surprised. Isn’t that naturally the first thing to try?

“Alright... I won’t then.”

“Do that. Especially not dad – you absolutely cannot tell this to dad.”

Our father was a prime example of an old-fashioned conservative Japanese person, and he was very strict.

If our father found out about Kirino’s secret hobby... well, he would probably do something unthinkable.

“If I was found out... that would be bad, wouldn’t it... ?”

“Yes, it would be bad. Honestly, I don’t even want to think about that possibility. So cooperate with me here. We need to make sure your hobbies stay secret... although I’m not sure what we should do...”

“... Really?”

Kirino had a surprised expression on her face. It seemed that she couldn’t believe that I was offering her my help.

You... exactly what do you think of me? But I was too scared to ask.

As I was thinking these unhappy thoughts, I nodded.

“It’s OK. If anything happens, don’t hesitate to tell me. I can’t really give you great advice, but I’ll do what I can.”

I regretted these words right after they left my mouth.

“.... Re- Really? Then, let’s do that, I guess..... Yeah, if you do that for me, it would really help.... maybe...”

Kirino did not speak a single word of thanks, but she was repeatedly nodding and seemed happy.

Seeing my sister like this, honestly, I couldn’t think of a bad thing to say about her.

....Hmm. So, even my sister could get like this, huh...

As I was mulling over my surprise, I gazed at my sister’s shy face.

How nostalgic... I don’t know why, but it really felt nostalgic.

Geez... and for a moment there I thought that I had said something irresponsible.

Well, whatever, it somehow came to this. I guess that in the two days since I discovered that item in the entryway, she’s been agonizing and agonizing and agonizing over this, until she finally came to me for advice.

So now, I have to help her on this. Although, it’s all still a bit annoying.

.... Well well. But in any case, this situation could have been much worse... so I’m glad for that.

“So, in conclusion, you like little sister characters and you buy little sister eroges.... There’s nothing you’re not telling me, right?”

“Huh? If not that, what did you think it was?”

I had asked that question for some more peace of mind. Confused, Kirino inclined her neck.

And then, a few seconds later, she realized the “worst outcome” I was worried about, and she scowled.

“... Gross. Of course it’s not that.”

Whoa, in a single second she returned to the usual Kirino. Such undisguised disgust. This is definitely my sister.

Crap, I probably should be unhappy about this change but I can't help but feel a bit relieved. That charming side of Kirino was just strange.

"Aren't you the one who's gross...? The games you like are about a little sister loving an older brother, right? Are you denying that?"

"... Are you an idiot? Don't mix two-dimensional things with three-dimensional things. Games are games, real life is real life. Generally- in reality, are there really that many little sisters who love their older brothers?"

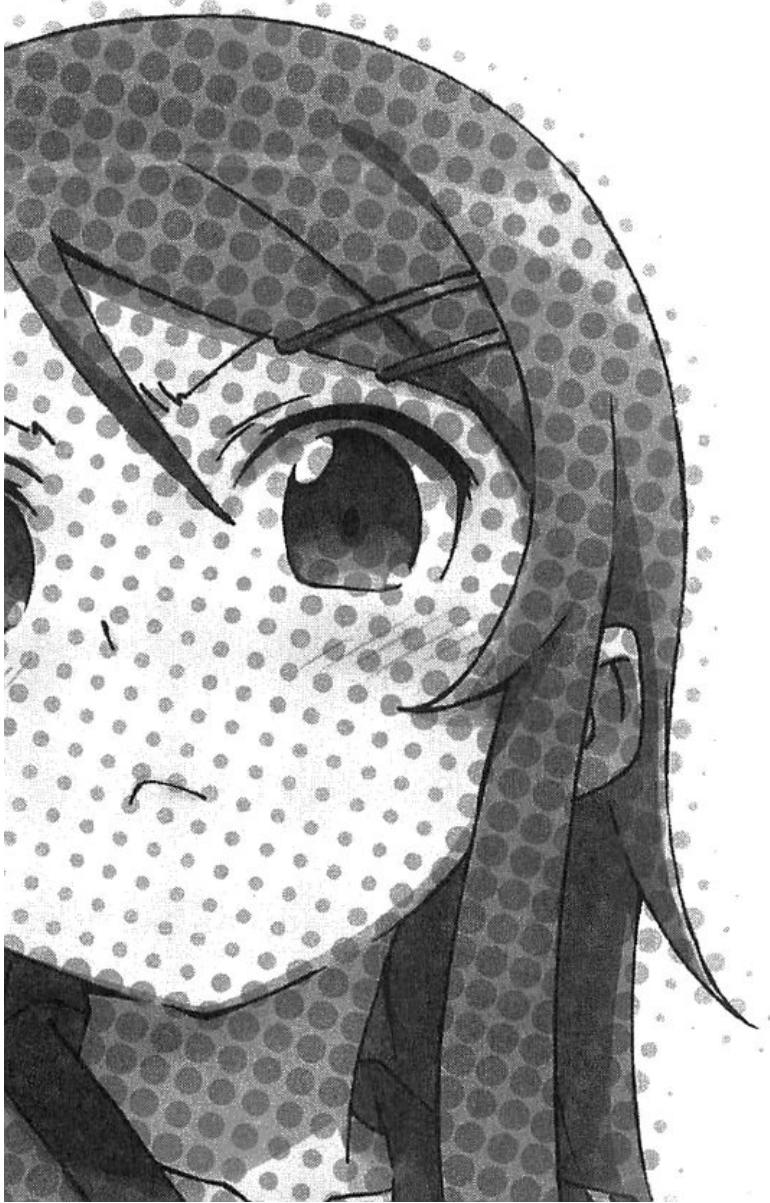
This girl... was that just a way to say "I hate you" in a really roundabout way? Isn't that cruel? There are a lot of brothers and sisters in this world that get along, aren't there? But it seems that in my case, we're eternal enemies!

"I don't have any more use for you. Could you leave?"

Dammit. As I thought, she really isn't cute at all.

ore no imouto ga konnani kawaii wake ga nai

第二章



Chapter 2:

Part 1

A week had passed since that night when I stepped on that huge landmine. That night, under the pretext of wanting life advice, my sister and I talked more than we had for years. But, even so, our cold relationship did not really change.

Since that night, we've gone back to our usual silence and have not said a single word to each other.

Well, that's life. Change doesn't come about that easily.

I had said that I would help my sister to the best of my ability, but up until now, I had received not a single request for help. I guess from the start, there really wasn't anything I could do for her. I was also not the kind of person who would take initiative and do something on my own for her, and so any lingering questions or interest I had in the matter had entirely melted. It's probably better this way.

I quickly forgot all about my sister and her strange hobby. It'd probably be best if we just went on as usual.

It'd be better that way... right?

As I was becoming entwined in these gloomy feelings, the bell signaling the end of classes rang, and the classroom stirred to life.

"Ahh. What?"

Stretching in my seat, I loosened my muscles which had stiffened through the boring class.

As this was happening, my bespectacled childhood friend drew near, and soon stood in front of me.

She leaned over and peered at my face.

“Kyou-chan, lately you’ve really seemed out of it. Feeling tired?”

“But I’ve always seemed out of it like this.”

Creaking my neck, I answered in a self-derisive way. Untidily sitting in my shallow seat, I drowsily opened my eyes halfway. I was the spitting image of the lazy high school student.

My bespectacled childhood friend began to lightly laugh.

“Ahaha, certainly. But Kyou-chan, when I said you looked out of it, I meant that you looked even more out of it than usual.”

“Hmm... well if you say so, then I guess.”

“You look so slovenly.”

“That’s also no different from usual... are you going back?”

“Yeah.”

Grabbing my backpack and standing up, I went out into the hall with my bespectacled childhood friend.

Tamura Manami. In a word, we were inseparable childhood friends¹. And, lately, she’s also occasionally filled the role of a private tutor for me at home.

As expected from someone with glasses, she was an honors student.

Outwardly, she appeared normal. She was actually relatively cute, but unfortunately, rather plain and unrefined.

Even if she took off her glasses, you couldn’t say that she was really pretty.

Even if she took off her glasses, her face was rather plain and normal.

¹ When Kyousuke says “inseparable,” he’s saying it slightly sardonically, as if they’re inseparable but this inseparability is somewhat annoying.

Her grades were just below the top of the class. She did not belong to any school clubs, but her hobbies were cooking and sewing. She had many well mannered friends, but in terms of close friends she would hang out with after school, those were almost nonexistent.

She was the supporting actress; titles like “normal,” “common,” and “mediocre” fit her more than anybody else. She was the polar opposite of Kirino.

Indeed, her appearance was not the best.

“What’s wrong? You’ve been staring at my face.”

“Nothing. It’s nothing. I was just thinking how normal you are...”

“Really? Don’t make me blush,ahaha...”

“It wasn’t really a compliment.”

Correction – she was normal but also just a bit airheaded.

“But, being normal is a pretty good thing, isn’t it?” my airheaded plain bespectacled friend said.

I responded with an “I guess.”

Banzai, mediocrity. Viva the normal life.

Those were my mottos, so painting Manami with this normalcy was a big comfort to me. When I was next to her, I could relax... this was also in stark contrast with my sister.

We were lined up and walking through the hallway.

“So, what’s the matter?”

“Uh, what?”

“As I saaid, Kyou-chan has been spacing out quite a bit recently. If you could, please tell me the reason.”

“The reason I’ve been spacing out, huh...?”

I guess Manami noticed my strangeness more than I did. I didn’t really notice anything off, but if she says so, then it might be true that I’ve been spending day after day spaced out. And, really, there can only be one reason why this could be happening.

“It has nothing to do with you. Don’t worry about it.”

I said this bluntly, and swung my school bag onto my shoulders. But, Manami wasn’t the type of girl that would just leave it at that.

Pursing her lips slightly, she looked up at me somewhat bitterly.

“It does have to do with me. A lot.”

“Huh? Why?”

“You’re asking...? Well, if I was being bothered by something, would you just say ‘It has nothing to do with me’ and pretend nothing is wrong?”

Her eyes gently narrowed as a laugh surfaced. Dammit, that was an unfair way to put it.

With a scowl, I murmured unhappily about her meddling. Manami continued to laugh loosely with an “ehee.” Why does she look so happy about this? With an amazed expression, I let out a sigh.

“You... you’re seriously more like my mom than my actual mother.”

“Oh? Is that just your way of telling me that you love me?”

“I mean that you stink of a mother.”

“... heeeeey...”

At my words, the bag Manami was carrying seemed to grow ten times in weight. Downhearted, she stopped walking.

Walking ahead one step and then turning back, I saw Manami’s eyes fill with tears.

“So meaaaaaaaan...”

Ah, I see, in the end what I said really seemed to have bothered her. Feeling guilty, I decided to answer Manami’s original question as far as I could. I couldn’t go into details, but I gave her a basic introduction and mentioned my sister’s name. Manami inclined her neck strangely.

“Your sister?”²

Still facing front, I nodded and responded with a “yeah.”

“What’s wrong with your sister?”

“That is... well... she came to me for some life advice.”

As I tried to be as vague as possible, Manami blinked in surprise.

“Life advice? From Kyou-chan?”

“... And what’s with that surprised look?”

Hey, don’t look at me as if coming to me for advice is that strange. Sensing my scornful expression, Manami became flustered and shook both her hands vigorously.

“Ah, no, it’s not like I was thinking that she was being reckless or anything.”

² There are honorifics here that are getting lost in translation. Manami refers to Kirino as “imouto-san,” where the “san” shows a bit of respect. I will generally try to keep honorifics in the text as much as possible, but writing “little sister-san” sounds way too weird.

“You... you’re really terrible at lying, you know?”

Smiling, I snatched her glasses. Playfully putting them on myself, I saw the world warp.

“Gi- give me my glasses back.”

Glasses, glasses~~, teasing her like a scene straight out of some manga, I suddenly returned to the issue at hand.

“She called it advice, but in the end, all I did was listen to her talking.”

“Wah.”

The frantic Manami took the glasses I returned to her and put them back on.

Seeing that I had walked ahead a bit, Manami lightly sprinted to catch up. Checking that she was indeed walking by my side, I continued talking.

“... But she seemed really bothered. I didn’t really know what to do either, so I couldn’t really do anything except leave things as is.”

“H... Hmm...”

The conversation having halted, for a little while we walked quietly down the hallway.

Manami had placed her index finger on her lips, and was looking upwards, but...

Suddenly, with an “eheh,” a slow laugh rose to the surface.

“You’re pretty nice, aren’t you Kyou-chan.”

“... Why do you have to put it like that? Don’t come near me, four-eyes.”

I spoke cruelly, and turned away. Geez, it was be pretty amateurish of me to let my embarrassment show out openly.

“You really couldn’t do anything... but, you really wanted to do something for her.”

“Haah...”

As if. I shrugged my shoulders and let out a sigh. But, Manami smiled with a knowing expression, as if she could see right through me.

Hmph. How annoying. This is another reason why childhood friends are so...

Because I made no effort to respond, our conversation temporarily ceased.

Changing our shoes in the shoebox, we exited the school building. The distance between the school and my house was approximately a kilometer.

Because Manami lived in the same neighborhood, we usually walked together until we reached my house.

As we were leaving the school gate, Manami began to talk.

“By the way, how have your studies been going?”

“It hasn’t been.”

“It must be if you can answer so quickly. Geez. Well, shall we study together today?”

“That would be a big help. Somehow or other, whenever I’m alone, I’m so unmotivated...”

“And you end up reading manga and stuff?”

“... Psychic, aren’t you?”

She really did know me too well. And now she’s laughing again...

Studying for exams. For a second year high school student, such a thing was quite normal.

Incidentally, I was aiming to attend the same local college as Manami.

It may have been just slightly girly³ of me, but the reason I want to go to that college is because I want to go to the same school as Manami. It's not as if I've fallen for her or anything, but it was just that I'm comfortable with our companionship and I wanted it to continue as long as possible. And, besides, if I can be with Manami, Miss Ordinary herself, then surely I can walk the path of normalcy that I have always aimed for. That's my logic.

My life's guideline, Manami, spoke.

"Alright then. So, shall we meet at my house and then go to the library? ... Oh, right, we also have some new types of monaka⁴. Since you're coming over anyways, you should try some."

"O- ohh, could I? I don't want to impose."

Manami's family ran a Japanese confectionary, so they often fed me sweets.

Even though I almost make a hobby out of teasing my childhood friend, there's no denying that her family's sweets are not bad. Maybe I think like this because, from hard candy to bean buns⁵, I've been getting fed sweets from their store since I was a child.

This was not the taste of a mother, but of a childhood friend, I suppose.

"It's fine. I don't think there's anything I can do for you to help with your sister's situation, so at the very least, I can make Kyou-chan a bit happy."

"... Well, aren't you good-natured."

³ Whoa. Just a bit sexist, Kyousuke?

⁴ Monaka is a wafer cake filled with bean filling. Google image search it if you want a visual.

⁵ Manjuu. I'm adding this footnote because manjuu is common enough that people recognize it, but it's not common enough so I translated it as "bean bun."

At my sarcasm, Manami bashfully chuckled with an “ehehe.” Looking downwards with a pleased face, Manami walked with her bag held in both hands in front of her, the bag making a *pata pata* sound as it hit her skirt. This was a sign between childhood friends, and was similar to a puppy wagging its tail. “Praise me more, praise me more,” it meant.

“You’re going to be a good grandmother. Whoever ends up being your grandson is going to be very happy.”

“... H-hey... don’t you mean ‘You’re going to be a good wife. Whoever ends up being your husband is going to be happy?’”

“Nah, definitely a grandmother. For some reason, every time I talk to you, I always have the same feeling as if I’m drinking tea on my late grandmother’s veranda.”

“... That’s not a compliment, is it? That’s not a compliment at all... hmph, you don’t think I’m sexy at all, do you, Kyou-chan? Even though you’re pretty plain looking⁶ yourself.”

“You’re the last person I want to hear that from!”

If we really thought of each other as pretty plain... I guess we were rather similar, then.

As I was trying to change the subject, we came to the side of my house.

If we turned left at the T-junction up ahead, we would come to my house.

And, what good timing – or should I say bad timing – we encountered Kirino who was also returning from school.

“Gah.”

At that moment, I stopped (right near to the lower portion of the T-junction).

⁶ She actually says “you look like a minor character.”

From the left hand side of the T-junction, the uniformed teen magazine model was walking towards us. It looked like she was with a few girls from her class. And every last girl that my sister was talking to was pretty good looking. They weren't my type, but they were definitely a cut above the rest.

And I mean, there definitely are idol groups that are made up entirely of girls in their early teens. Although, I don't think you would see them walking down the street like this talking loudly.

"....."

We stood there, silently.

In front of these two supporting players, a dazzling aura danced about, and we passed by the group of junior high girls.

"Haah~..."

With an envious stare, Manami watched those flashy young girls pass us by.

"Those were some really cute girls, weren't they? Being young is pretty wonderful."

"Hey, grandma, have you forgotten that you're only in high school? Are you really that old and forgetful?"

Man, she acts so old now I can barely follow her. What a hopeless situation.

"I know already, grandpa. But, even when I was in junior high, I wasn't that refined, right? Junior high school students are still kids, right? ... But they seemed much more mature than that. I'm pretty jealous... I guess I'll just have to try harder."

"... It really doesn't matter... you're fine the way you are."

If Manami became like Kirino, I honestly wouldn't have any more rest in my life.

Much more than the refined, modern ladies who passed us, I preferred being with my normal, plain childhood friend.

Hmph. After all, for me and Manami, those girls lived in an entirely different world.

Dammit, I understood this all too well.

Chapter 2: Part 2

A few more days had passed. For a long time, I had avoided speaking to my sister.

It was Sunday. In the morning, I had gone out with Manami to the library. When evening came, I walked with Manami to her house and returned home, whereupon I found Kirino waiting in the entryway.

She was leaning against the wall with her arms crossed. Her dangerous sidelong glance pierced through my heart.

.... Uhhh... Did I do something to piss her off?

"... Come with me."

"W-Why?"

I asked this nervously, as Kirino continued to glance at me from the corner of her eye.

"Life advice. Part two."¹

She muttered this thickly. I know what she wanted to say, but why does she have to say it with such frank hostility?

Is that really the proper attitude of someone asking someone else for advice?

"Part two, you say..."

"... Just come."

Without even letting me properly take off my shoes, Kirino began pulling at my sleeve. I might be overreacting, but her inability to actually directly take my hand is a bit irritating.

¹ She says "tsuduki," which means "continues."

“... Geez, as always there’s probably no point in arguing, is there...”

Being friendly, I didn’t try to fight against Kirino’s threatening attitude, and limply went up the stairs.

I was forcibly taken to my sister’s room.

As always, the room emitted a sweet smell. Incidentally, whenever I went to Manami’s room, I could always smell nothing other than incense. That’s so like a grandmother, isn’t it? ...Well, to each his own.

Kirino, who entered the room first, pulled out a chair in front of her PC, and beckoned me over with her index finger. What the hell is she trying to say? Was this not an advice session?

Not knowing what my sister really wanted, I was bewildered.

“Sit here.”

“A-alright.”

Obediently, I did as my sister commanded. Kirino came to my side, and leaned one hand on the table, putting her weight on it.

Kirino turned on her computer, and I soon found myself looking at the Windows startup screen. Soon, that screen was gone, and replaced by the desktop screen.

A number of cat-eared girls relaxing in a living room adorned Kirino’s desktop background.

In one corner of that cute desktop, there was an icon of a deformed cat peeking out from behind a wastebasket. There was a calendar in the upper left. In the upper portion, there was a messenger window open that was shaped like an oblong set of cat ears. Browser and other icons were also lined up in an organized way.

“... You’re really into this stuff, aren’t you...”

“Sure. I changed the skin, and used a cute launcher to dress everything up. It’s pretty basic stuff, isn’t it?”

She let out a proud laugh.

Using a launcher and skin to dress something up...? ... What the hell. Why is she using all these technical terms? There wasn’t a single thing she said that I understood, but I think all she means is that she customized her desktop².

Really, this type of showing off was pretty consistent with both her sides, as an otaku and as a girl in junior high.

“Well? What’s the point of showing me this?”

“I’m shocked. You still don’t know?”

As if I could know! From right beside me, Kirino gave me a scornful look. Taking the computer mouse, she spoke.

“... It’s the game, the game.³ We’re going to play it together.”

“Wha-? The game... you mean, you and me? Together?”

“... Y-yeah.”

She answered without looking at me. She probably became a bit self-conscious that she was saying some pretty weird things, so this was hard for her to say.

Honestly, I don’t know at all. Why do I, a guy who isn’t even that friendly with my sister, have to stand here and play a game with her? Whether this was a competitive game or not⁴, I was getting an unpleasant feeling about it...

Maybe she realized how puzzled I was, but Kirino tried to smooth things over.

² Trust me, Kyousuke, none of us know what she’s talking about either.

³ I lost the game.

⁴ He says “whether this is battle or not.” I interpreted that in context, “battle” was referring to the “game.”

“You said it yourself, didn’t you? That you would help me as much as you could, or something...”

“Well, I meant that I would help you keep this secret from our parents... I thought that was the main point, why do I have to play this game so suddenly?”

“I-It’s necessary! It’s ok, so come on, hold this...”

“H-Hey...”

I was forcibly given the mouse by Kirino. I would have thought that she would never want to touch me, but she was covering my own hand with hers, manipulating the mouse. She maneuvered it to the icon in the corner and double clicked.

Man, she’s suddenly so tense...

Where was the usual cool attitude that she usually had? If I thought about it, maybe this was her real personality. She became so animated when she was doing this stuff. I only recently came to understand this though, and normally she blends into her surroundings and feigns innocence.

Cooling down, she casually looked at me with a cynical glint, slightly defiant.

Wearing the latest clothing, talking about the latest gossip, going out with her friends to do karaoke or whatever...

She was embodiment of the “trendy junior high school girl” (do people say that anymore)?⁵

Whether that was a good lifestyle or not, I wasn’t really in a position to judge.

But seriously, Kirino... regardless of all that, don’t you want to play these games with your friends?

⁵ Kyousuke uses the phrase “iketeru,” which means “trendy,” which is what he’s referring to when he wonders “do people say that anymore?”

“... What are you staring at? You’re making me sick.”

“Nothing.”

Oh well, I guess there’s no helping it. I’ll hang out with her for a bit, I guess.

Exuding the spirit of an elder brother, I watched as the game booted up and displayed on the screen.

Ping! A lively title screen showed up, and I was greeted by the voices of young girls.

Little~ Sister~ Maker~ EX! Voluuume Four~! Welcome home, oniichan! Let’s love each other!⁶

“What the hell are you trying to get me to do?!”

I should get out of here. I should get out of here right away. I should have known when she led me to into her room instead of into the living room to play. This damn girl, where in the world is there a brother who would play games like this with his little sister? Am I a pervert or something?! Huh?!

You probably already knooow, buuut... oniichan? All the little sisters who appear in this game... they’re all eighteen or older, okaaaaaay?

Shut up, you also shut up a bit.

Rubbing my temples to dull my headache, I turned to Kirino.

‘Y-you...’

“What are you suddenly shouting for? Don’t be so surprised.... hey, don’t get so close.”

⁶ OK, there are “cutesy” embellishments here I cannot possibly translate into English. Also, “Volume Four” is said in English with a heavy Japanese accent.



Her words stabbed me like a poisoned knife. I wanted to say something, but seeing her face darken, I stopped in my tracks.

“Hey... what’s wrong?”

“... As I thought, you’re making fun of me.”

“Huh? What?”

“I guess you’re all talk. You think it’s a bad thing and you haven’t even tried it... you say sweet things, but in your heart you think I’m weird...”

She glared at me, obviously annoyed.

“Umm... no no... it’s not like that...”

I gloomily played with the head of the mouse in my hand.

“I-I’m not making fun of you! Playing this kind of stuff in front of you just makes me feel awkward! You understand, don’t you?! You know, this isn’t exactly the same as two people watching a kissing scene in a drama in the living room, right?!”

“What the hell does that mean? I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Could it be... that she really has no idea what I mean? Or rather, did I say something awkward?

No, but I definitely had a point. Pointing to the screen, I spoke.

“I don’t know the particulars, but in this game, you probably get close to a virtual little sister, and then do this and that, right? And what’s more, it’s a game for guys above 18, right? So I mean, the natural conclusion is that during the story’s climax, certain things would happen...”

While Kirino put on an angry expression, I started up again.

“You... watching those kinds of scenes with me, you don’t think anything of it?”

“Ah!”

Having finally realized what I was insinuating, Kirino’s face flushed a brilliant red.

“F-for me, I mean,... I didn’t realize what you meant before... don’t say pointless things. And, the way you put it, you make me sound like some pervert.”

Ah, I see, I know my mistake now. She’s not playing these games because they’re 18+, or because they include those kinds of scenes. When she says that she loves little sister characters, she doesn’t really mean anything perverted by that. Well, that should have been obvious, considering she’s a girl...

For now, that was my conclusion.

I wiped my forehead with the back of my hand.

“Okay... I understand now, Kirino. I think I know where you’re coming from now. Let’s talk now, okay? It’s alright... that is,”

Click the screen, but gently, won’t you~~?

“Shut up, dammit! Don’t interrupt at bad times!”

Geez, I’m yelling at a computer screen. I must be going crazy.

This isn’t good... I have to calm down...

“... Hey, don’t bully Shiori-chan.”

“You also, return to the real world. It’s just a drawing.”

“Don’t call her a drawing!”

Crap, did I say something careless...? What are you shouting for?

Ahh, dammit. What the hell. What should I do? Someone tell me. Man, this is getting out of hand...

I exhaustedly collected myself, and tried to explain myself.

"It was my bad. I spoke without really knowing the situation. I'm not trying to say that what you're doing is bad, or trying to make fun of you, not in the slightest. That is the definite truth. Please believe me."

"..."

Pursing her lips, Kirino looked at me with tear-filled eyes.

"But... I think this game is a bit too high of a hurdle for me right now. See, I'm still only seventeen. I'm not trying to make fun of you, but playing this is impossible for me. ... I mean, do you see what I'm saying? I mean, this is probably a really interesting game, right? It's a game you recommended to me, right? That I understand all too well. So, I'm sticking my neck out here and asking you to please let me go this time. I know you're reluctant to, but I mean, playing this 18+ game not alone, but with my little sister next to me... unfortunately I just don't have the courage for that."

"... Coward."

My sister threw that scornful word at me.

You can get through this... you can get through this, Kyousuke...! If I stop now, things will just get much more complicated...

Sigh...

Kirino gave a huge sigh. Hey, hey, I'm the one who should be sighing here.

Kirino began talking as if nothing had happened.

"Well... let's make it homework then."

“Homework?”

“Yes. After all, you don’t want to play this next to me, right? So, let’s call it homework. I’ll lend you my laptop along with everything, and you can play the game by next week.”

“.....”

If I refuse her now, she’ll get angry again and think I’m making fun of her, won’t she...?

Feeling my cheeks cramping, I knew that in the end, I couldn’t resist the oppressive aggression of my sister.

“Alright... so I should play this then? I should... play this...?”

“Yes, exactly.”

Kirino moved the mouse with a triumphant look. When she clicked to exit the application, the girl who was on the title screen (she must have been only two heads tall) appeared again, and quickly bowed. Waving her hands energetically, she said a sorrowful goodbye.

“Oniichan <3. Promise you’ll come back to play, okay? ~ Bai-baiii.”

“Yeah, yeah... bai-bai...”

You’re quite something, aren’t you?⁷

It’s not like my sister has ever once called out to me like that.

⁷ He is presumably referring to the girl in the game.

Chapter 2: Part 3

The next evening, wanting a cold drink, I went into the living room and saw Kirino there.

She was in her usual uniform with the damn short skirt. She sat there like a queen, her legs crossed and reading a teen magazine. As always, she exuded an aura that said “servant, don’t come near me.”

She was a princess, through and through. And, for ordinary people like me, she was not someone we could easily talk to.

I’m not complaining. Standing here, I’m just reaffirming that although I had the opportunity recently to speak with her for just a bit, we haven’t become any closer at all.

“...”

Staring at the distant form of Kirino, I poured a glass full of wheat tea and drank it dry. Feeling energized, I tried to leave the living room. But, when I put a hand on the doorknob, I heard a voice from behind me.

“...Hey.”

“W-what is it?”

Like a rusty robot, I awkwardly turned around.

Having momentarily taken her eyes off of her magazine, Kirino asked a terse question.

“Did you do it?”

“.....Umm.What do you mean?”

When I asked for clarification, Kirino tossed her magazine there, and stared at me like some famous performer would stare at an underling. She muttered this.

“You didn’t play it?”

“.....Um.....Er.....Huh?”

Wha? How did she know that?

Whoaa... scary. Kirino-san is seriously scaaary. Come on, forgive me...

Seeing me flinch, Kirino continued to apply pressure.

“Why? Didn’t I say it was homework? Why haven’t you done it yet?”

Why? Why do I have to get preached at by my sister just because I haven’t played the eroge she lent me?

What’s exactly become of my life? ...I mean, man! It’s because I’ve never really been able to speak my mind without holding back! What’s sad is that even though I have a real little sister, I have to play an 18+ little sister game. Ah, seriously, I don’t have an ounce of mental strength to resist this.

Can anybody understand my predicament...?

“Well because... I’m just a beginner, right? Even after reading the instruction booklet, I’m not too sure of how to play.”

I told her my lame excuse with tearing eyes.

Looking furious, Kirino responded. “If that’s the case, tell me that earlier.”

And then, I saw a complete change, almost like a performer changing characters backstage.

“Hmm... well, I’m only at the beginning stages, so I’ll explain it to you. Come to my room.”

She caught my sleeve, and urged me upstairs. We went out of the living room, but as we were climbing the stairs, I decided to try objecting.

“B-but... the entire point yesterday was that I don’t want to play it next to you, wasn’t it?”

“Ah... right right. Geez, you’re spoiled, aren’t you? ... But come for now.”

Dammit, why did she have to say that about me? Isn’t that what I should be saying?

Having gone up the stairs, she brought me once again to her room.

Kirino brought her computer back from standby, and said this.

“... I guess I can’t help it, so I’ll get out the version for all ages.”

“If such a thing existed why didn’t you get it out in the first place?!”

“... You don’t understand at all. The all ages version and the 18+ version have the same title, but they’re different games.”

Isn’t it cool of me to be actually going along with this conversation? Somebody compliment me.

“Huh... but the all ages version... isn’t the only difference that they take out all the ero scenes?”

“If you say that, it’s an insult to both the writers and the fans. Don’t say it again. ... Often, when I see that an 18+ game I have has gotten an all ages remake, I try it out. And then, I’m often saying to myself ‘this is pretty different.’ How do I put it? It just seems unsatisfying... I’m still a beginner so I can’t really explain it but, there are things that you only can do in an 18+ version, I think.”

“Huh.”

I really have no idea at all.

“But, look, they added a heroine, and she’s fully voiced. That’s good, isn’t it?”

I said this, although I was still a bit troubled by the entire thing.

“I’ve said a lot, but I really just want to say that... the all ages version is also good, but if it’s possible, I really want you to try the original version. That’s why I left the original version for you as homework.”

“... Then, why are we using the all ages version now?”

“Ugh, because! You said that you didn’t know how to play, remember? Be a bit more grateful that I’m showing you how to play.”

Grateful, huh...

Dammit... I really have to do this, don’t I?

Taking the mouse, I watched as the game screen changed and I was faced with the display.

The usual annoying little girl voice along with the “Loving my Little Sister” title appeared.

Underneath the title, the message **“Click the screen gently, okay?”** flashed.

Kirino became unusually talkative, and from my side let fly various instructions.

“Alright, start. First you put in your name... wait, why are you going with the default name? Put in your real name – your real name.”

“Real... name...? Why? Do I have to?”

“Huh? Isn’t it obvious? It’s the little sisters calling your own name that makes you feel so good. Here, quickly... okay.”

“Dammit. Is it really alright to be doing this?... Is it really...”

I was getting desperate. Playing my first little sister game with my real name... this was going to be tough, wasn't it...

Chapter 2:

Part 4

So, then, I decided to listen to the explanation of the basic system of “Loving my Little Sister (All Ages Version).” Of course, because I had just started playing, I was only listening – there was nothing really for me to say.

If I’m a bit slow, please forgive me.

Hmm... So in this game, the player (that would be me) primarily uses the left mouse button to scroll through and read text that appears on the lower portion of the screen. Or, as Kirino puts it,

“Well, it’s just a normal adventure game. You don’t really need an instruction booklet.”

And so it seemed. When I had glanced at the instruction manual (I had picked it up just before now), I read that there were three fundamental things that, when put together, made up the game display: the text window, the background image, and the pictures of the characters.

Furthermore, when special event scenes come up, the background display changes to an “event CG,” a single drawing that helps liven up the game.

If I had to describe it honestly, I would call it a glorified, extravagant picture story show.

The game’s system was so simple, and how to operate the controls was also easy to figure out.

Hm, well I guess even I can handle this much...

Putting in my name, and starting the game, I was presented with a blue sky background. Then, the protagonist’s first monologue began.

“My name is Kousaka Kyousuke. If I had to describe myself, I would say I was an extremely commonplace high school student.”

... What a boring guy... Suddenly calling himself commonplace... hey hey (I thought with a bitter smile).

After I went through so much effort putting in my own name, at least say something a bit more tasteful.

Sensing my first negative impressions, Kirino, with good timing, interrupted with an explanation.

"Hey, just telling you, because they want the player to be able to easily empathize with the main character, they usually make the main character a very ordinary, plain person. And, so there is room for him to grow in the story, he's always a bit clumsy in the beginning."

"Hmm."

Even though I knew that they weren't talking about me, why is there an aching in my chest? It's probably because the character has my name, so it's difficult to think that the character is a different person.

Alright, let's see if we can't stop being boring then. I'm counting on you, Kyousuke.

And also... Kirino gets quite talkative when we're talking about this kind of stuff, doesn't she?

Listening as Kirino excitedly continued to explain the game, I pushed the mouse buttons with a *click, click, click, click...*

When the ordinary, commonplace monologue ended, the screen blacked out. *chirp chirp*. A sound, not unlike the call of a tree sparrow, played.

Kyousuke: "Ahhhhh.... I slept a lot. Well, since I stayed up so late studying yesterday, I guess I can't help it."

He said a few more words, but we can skip those.

Well, in any case, I'll explain the gist of things that are being described on the screen.

In this version of the game, the protagonist, Kyousuke, wakes up in his room, and for some reason his sister, Shiori, is sleeping in the same futon. That's the scene that starts off the story.

Kyousuke: "Whaa... Shi-shiori...?"

Startled, I woke up fully, blinking rapidly.

Kyousuke: "You surprised me... geez, Shiori, when in the world did you..."

Hm? Why is he being so calm about this?

Hey, hey, be more conscious of the danger of the situation, Kyousuke. Are you still half asleep or something? Didn't you just wake up with your little sister sleeping next to you? Shouldn't you be shouting in surprise at a time like this?

Shiori was the black-haired, timid looking small girl who had the twin pigtails.

This was the character that Kirino had said she really liked. Right now, though, her hair was untied and straight.

"Hey, hey, seeing her sleeping soundly and defenselessly like that, how is it? You were surprised, weren't you?"

"Well.... I mean. It's.... normal? I guess."

As Kirino went on the sing the praises of the Event CG, I gave that vague response.

When I tried to click and advance again, suddenly, a new window opened in the middle of the display.

"Oh?"

“This is a choice point. The player has to pick what the protagonist does at important plot points. And, depending on what you pick, your relationships with the little sisters will change, and afterwards the story will also change.”

“Hm? ... Then, which one should I pick? There are three choices...”

“Huh? If you don’t pick it yourself, there’s no point in the game, is there? It’s alright, in this game, all the choices are really simple.”

Kirino said this lightly. I see. So it’s like that, is it?

Alright, time to pick what the protagonist is going to do. Alright... so, which one?

To the peacefully sleeping Shiori, I will...

1. Gently hug her close.

“Let’s not do that one...”

Was I looking for trouble? Hugging my little sister who’s sleeping was an insane idea.

2. Gently pull out the futon so as to not wake her.

“Hm...”

I guess that was the safe choice. But, come on, Kyousuke. If you don’t teach her some discipline now, then it’s going to come back to haunt you in the future. It’s already too late for my real little sister, but you won’t go down the same path as I did... Alright, so I won’t pick this one either. Without faltering, I clicked on the third option.

3. Without any hesitation, kick her off the futon.

Bang! (The screen shook a bit.)

Kyousuke: “Hey, don’t go freely wandering into other people’s futons! Wake up, idiot!”

Alright. That was definitely the appropriate action. Good job, Kyousuke. Heh, this is a pretty good game, isn’t it? Alright, and next is...

“What the hell are you doing to Shiori-chan?!”

Bang! A counterattack flew at me from my real little sister. The kick she let fly overturned the chair I was sitting on.

“Hu-whaa?! What are you doing all of a sudden?!”

I got up and issued this complaint, and was met with a fierce glare. Kirino shouted.

“Isn’t that what I should be asking you?! Why the hell did you pick ‘Without any hesitation, kick her off the futon’?! I seriously can’t believe this, what the hell were you thinking?!”

“Well... that is... umm... first I had to... umm... teach my little sister to not take me lightly¹ ... yeah?”

“What? Did you just say something?”

“Uhh... it’s nothing.”

Pathetic! I’m so pathetic... and geez, my sister’s strong, isn’t she... I did not see that attack coming at all.

I guess Kirino’s already grown up, so it’s already too late to do anything about her brutal behavior.

Clutching the place on my side where Kirino had kicked me, I gave a huge internal sigh.

¹ I was sorely tempted to translate this as “RESPECT MY AUTHORITYAH” a la Cartman from South Park. Hehe.

I sat back into my chair. Grabbing the mouse, I started the game again. Clicking and scrolling through Kyousuke's text, suddenly, the background music turned very sad.

Shiori: "S-s-sorry... s-sorry Kyousuke Oniichan... umm... I-I.. last night... I couldn't sleep alone.... So then... and then..."

Kyousuke: "Huh? Are you saying something?"

Shiori: "A... N-nothing. It's nothing.... e-ehehe! Good morning, oniichan."

Shiori clutched at the part of her side which had been kicked, but even then she put on a courageous smile.

"He's a pretty terrible person, this protagonist."

"Ugh, that's the result of your own choice isn't it?! And I mean, to think this kind of scenario existed! I've never ever picked that choice before, so this is the first time I'm seeing this! ... Ah, dammit... she looks so pitiable, Shiori-chan does..."

Kirino looked sympathetically at the heroine who was already subject to such harsh treatment so early in the game.

But, Kirino, you treated me in a similar way just now...

I wisely didn't point this out to her, and valiantly continued to play the game.

From the early morning, a gloomy atmosphere reigned in the Kousaka household.
² After the decision point, the protagonist Kyousuke turned into a tyrant and chased Shiori out of his room. Afterwards, he changed into his school uniform and headed towards the dining room.

There, six little sisters who all adored their big brother waited for the protagonist.

"Hey, Kirino? There are a lot of places where these girls look completely different. No matter how I look at it, they really don't look like blood relatives."

² Here he is referring to the virtual Kousaka household in the game.

“They can’t help that. Different people draw each of the heroines.”

It was a silly question, but, wasn’t that the most unhelpful answer she could have given? Well, whatever, this isn’t exactly the place to make a snide remark.

I left-clicked. The heroines having all gathered, the dining event started.

Ping! The image changed to a viewpoint overlooking the dining table. Icons resembling each of the little sisters were scattered about the screen, flashing and growing bigger and smaller. In the upper half of the display, in circular font stood the message **“Oniichan, who do you want to talk with~?”**

“Oh? The display changed again.”

“This is an event choice display. If you click the icon of the little sister you want to talk with, a conversation event with that little sister will start. And then, there will be more choices you have to make in the conversation, and according to what you choose, her affection points for you can go up or down.”

“Hm. And what do you mean by ‘affection points?’”

“It’s a number that tells us how much one of the little sisters likes her big brother. If you don’t get this number above a certain point, you won’t be able to see certain events. There are also different endings based on this. So, fundamentally, seeing lots of events with the little sister you want to capture, and then raising her affection points is what you need to do in this game. And, also, if you raise the affection points of a number of the little sisters by a lot, then it’ll be easier to unlock special scenes, like a Valentine’s Day scene. So you shouldn’t spend all your time with one little sister.”

For some time now, Kirino has been a bit too feverish to explain all of this. Yada yada yada yada yada... is doing this that fun?

“I-I see... By the way, how many affection points do you have for me?”

“... Do you really want to know?”

“Nah, it’s fine.”

With that expression, I don’t have to hear her answer to know. I wonder; in the real world, if my sister’s affection points for me were not below a certain value, then would previously unseen special events also spring forth?

“So, that’s generally how the game flows... understand?”

“Yeah.”

Having finished her tutorial, Kirino then showed me how to save in the game, and turned off the game. Afterwards, she looked at my face to gauge my impressions.

“Any thoughts?”

“I don’t have any yet... I just started, after all.”

“I-I see... That’s true, I guess...”

If I were to be honest, I would say that I don’t think this type of game suits me at all. It wasn’t a question of whether the game was interesting or not. It’s just that, for people who have real little sisters, the idea of enjoying the affections of a fictional little sister is hard to imagine... No matter how many times Shiori and the others made a cute face, and said cute things, and sought my attention, I wouldn’t be able to stop myself from thinking that they had ulterior motives.

How do I put it... little sister cynicism? For example, if Kirino were to play a game in which you captured big brothers, do you think she would be able to sincerely enjoy that game? It’s impossible, wouldn’t you say? It’s just like that for me in this case.

But, I mean, I already said that I would try this game. I guess I’ll play just this one to the very end.

“Hmm, so, what should we do next, I wonder.”

Looking like she was having fun, Kirino opened up a folder and meandered the cursor around... Could it be that, she wasn't satisfied with just one little sister game, and wanted to make me play another one?

“...”

I was too afraid to ask, but this was probably the case. As I thought, she was serious about this. But honestly, whatever the point of all this is, I don't really feel obligated to do so much...

However, somehow, I understood why Kirino was making me play these little sister games.

“Hey... Kirino.”

“What? Why do you look so serious?”

“For you... at school, is there anybody you can play these games with, who you can talk about these games with?”

Upon hearing my question, Kirino's expression became vacant, and she looked slightly downwards.

“... That doesn't matter, does it?”

“I see.”

I recalled the earlier scene of Kirino walking with her classmates. ... Amongst that lot, not one of them probably watched child-oriented anime, or played little sister games.

And, I mean, that was the image I had of my little sister until a little while ago. If I were in Kirino's position, I also probably wouldn't feel like looking for people with similar interests in order to come out in the open with my hobbies.

“Well, it doesn't have to be a classmate... do you know anybody who has the same hobbies, who you can talk to openly about games and anime?”

At this second question, Kirino did not nod.

“... That doesn’t matter.”

“I see.”

And so she came to encourage me to take up the same hobby. She wanted to be able to talk together about it. Hiding your hobby from everyone around you, and only enjoying it by yourself... that’s a pretty lonely existence.

Yesterday, Kirino had taken me to this room, and said that she wanted to continue the “life advice” session.

But I think that was just a simple excuse... that it wasn’t really for “life advice.”

“What are you doing...? Are you making fun of me?”

“No, it’s not that.”

It really wasn’t. Somehow or other, she just wanted to do this. You’re lonely, aren’t you? But you don’t want to admit that. That’s true, isn’t it – you’re not being honest with yourself.

But, honestly, I can’t really get into your hobby much more than this. If there was some other person instead who could, that would be the best. It would definitely save me a lot of trouble.

“Kirino...”

I inclined my neck and looked at the ceiling. If I were over twenty, I could imagine myself blowing cigarette smoke out into the air.

“Do you... want to make friends?”

“H... huh?”

Kirino's eyes widened in surprise. Her expression revealed her inner thoughts of *What is this idiot saying?*

So far so good. With unusual determination, I stared right back at my sister.

I put on a bold smile, and turned the chair around. With the air of a life counselor, I pointed towards the bed.

"Hey, sit there please."

"..."

Kirino looked like she wanted to object, but in the end reluctantly did as I said.

Well, alright, I guess she's willing to listen to what I have to say.

"You said it already, right? You asked me 'what should I do?' And, at that time, I didn't give you any good advice. So now, I'll give you an answer. Go make friends."

"Fri...ends?"

"Yes. People who have the same hobbies, who, when you start talking about these things, whether it be anime, or games, or 18+ things, they will be able to properly engage in the conversation. Of course, those kinds of people would never look down on you or make fun of you, because after all, you're all birds of a feather."

"... So you mean... I should make otaku friends?"

I nodded.

"..."

Sitting on the bed, Kirino thought seriously about this while biting her lip and clutching her knees. But...

At long last, she muttered this.

“... I don’t want to... make otaku friends. If we’re together, people will also think I’m one of them.”

“Again, isn’t that ridiculous talk? ... You’re a huge otaku, aren’t you?”

“... N-no, that’s-”

“No? Then, what are you? I mean, if you can, please answer that for me.”

Having finally become a bit fed up with my sister’s attitude, I tried to corner her with my words. Kirino looked downwards in shame and was silent. Her shoulders shook.

I clicked my tongue.

“The one who’s all talk, the one who’s making fun of otaku, that’s you, isn’t it? I said it already, didn’t I? Whatever hobby you might have, they won’t make fun of you. So, what do you think? People who have the same hobbies, who don’t hide but are open about being otaku, do you really think they could make fun of you?”

“...”

Kirino raised her head, and gave me a penetrating glare. ...Crap, she’s really angry. Even though I was cowering on the inside, I still put on a brave face.

“That would be impossible, right? It would make no sense. It would be like someone making fun of himself.”³

I’m doing pretty well here, if I do say so myself. This is pretty unlike me.

Kirino clicked her tongue loudly. I really didn’t think of her as the kind of person who would admit defeat here, so it was frightening.

“That’s not the issue! It’s a matter of public image!”

³ I know this should be “himself or herself,” but I did it this way to keep the dialogue more colloquial.

“Public image?”

“Yes, public image. Certainly, I like anime and I really like eroge. You could say I love them.”

You could say... to hear that from a junior high school girl, what should my reaction be?

Seeing me draw back, Kirino spoke arrogantly.

“Of course. Being with my friends at school is also really fun. But, this stuff is also fun. I can’t just pick one. So there’s no helping it, is there? What I like is what I like.”

Kirino looked as proud as she usually was.

“But, I also know that the world tends to look coldly on otaku.... And Japan is the most prejudiced in this way... don’t you think so?”

A junior high school girl. As a student in junior high, she must understand this all too well.

“Umm... so what I want to say is... that is... I belong to both sides of this.”

She told me her feelings, but couldn’t find the best words to express those feelings, so she was stumbling on her words a bit.

What she was saying was jumbled and difficult to understand... but I think that I got the gist of what she was trying to say.

She liked anime and loved eroge. But, she also really likes being with her friends at school, so she can’t choose one at the expense of the other. She had a normal school girl side, and an otaku side. Both these sides were joined together in her person. This is probably what Kirino wanted to say. Probably.

“But... because of that, I don’t want to tell the truth to my parents, and I definitely don’t want to tell the truth to my friends. If that happened, I really wouldn’t be able to go to school anymore.”

Public image. For a student, it was an important thing, perhaps even more so than for adults. Everyone understands that junior high school students are just the type to exclude someone socially and relentlessly attack them as if they were some foreign object. I also knew this. I knew this all too well.

I guess it’s pretty natural that anyone would care a lot about their public image.

Preserving your public image or embracing your hobbies... what a dilemma. Not being able to talk to anyone about this, you tried your best to deal with it, didn’t you, Kirino?

OK, I understand the problem now, Kirino.

“So, in other words, as long as you don’t have to tell your classmates, you’re fine with making some otaku friends?”

“Y-yeah... I guess... that’d be okay.”

“Then that’s fine. Without ever exposing yourself to your classmates, then, you should go find otaku friends.”

And that’s how it was. Well, I had at least reaffirmed Kirino’s feelings. And if she had a mind to make friends, then somehow or other we’d manage, I think.

“What? Do you have a good plan or something?”

“Not really. Unfortunately, I can’t think of anything.”

“It’s pointless... how useless.”

She declared this with a scornful expression. Hmph, well, don’t say it like that. Hey, are you also trying to say that I’m a useless guy?

“Well, just leave it to me.”

“Huh? What’s with that confidence?”

I faced Kirino’s puzzled look with a bold smile.

Oh, sister, don’t you know?

In this world, there’s a thing called a grandmother’s fountain of wisdom.

Chapter 2:

Part 5

“So, what about trying to participate in some ofukai?”

This suggestion came from my bespectacled childhood friend over the phone. After leaving my sister’s room, I lay face-down on my bed, and was speaking to Manami over the phone.

Of course, I couldn’t expose my little sister’s secret to her, so I had skillfully left out the particulars; I only asked Manami for advice on how to find people with similar hobbies while keeping it a secret from classmates.

“Ofukai?”

“Yeah, ofukai. Umm... it’s where you take people you’ve become close with online and hang out with them in real life... or something.”

“...”

Hm, I guess by “ofukai” she means “offline meetings.”¹

This grandma... pronouncing her Western words so stiffly, that’s just confusing.

“Yeah right. You know how to use the Internet?”

“... I can do that much, you know... geez... Kyou-chan, you’re making fun of me, aren’t you?”

“Well, I mean, old people generally are pretty bad with technology, you know.”

“I’m seventeen!! I’m a spunky high school student!”

¹ She says ofukai, which is a combination of the words “ofu” which is just the American word “off” and “kai,” which is the Japanese word for “meeting.” Hence, offline meeting.

Masami pleaded with me. As always, her word choice was interesting² (2).

I could almost imagine Manami scrunching up her face in annoyance with tears filling her eyes on the other end of the telephone.

"Geez, Kyou-chan. If you don't cut it out I'm going to get angry! Punpun..."

Who the hell says 'punpun'?

But in any case, hearing this girl's voice after that meeting with Kirino really sets my heart at ease.

"Ah, I'm sorry then... But you really have a PC?"

"Huh? Y-yeah, I have one. It's my brother's, though..."

She said this last part in a hushed whisper. She's really bad with secrets, isn't she?

"So... you only know how to use it a little then."

"Yeah... but I mean, I can use the Internet pretty well at least."

"Uh-huh."

Hmph, I knew something was suspicious from your strange pronunciation. You're a grandmother and you know you're not good at using Western words, so you really shouldn't rely on them so much³.

"So, have you participated in these offline meetings? Ah, I guess it wasn't you, but your brother?"

"I think so. He said he just recently went to an ofukai for an R&B community of his... umm, Kyou-chan, do you know about 'Social Networking Services.'"

² Kyousuke actually says that her use of gitago, or onomatopoeia, is interesting. She uses the word "pichipichi," which means "lively or spunky," to describe herself. This is what Kyousuke is referring to.

³ Kyousuke is most likely referring to the "ofukai" incident mentioned earlier.

“Ah, SNS? Yeah, I’ve heard about that. You register, make a profile page with your hobbies and whatnot, write a public blog, and make online friends, stuff like that right?”

“Yeah. The famous one is Mixi.⁴ The one my brother uses has an age restriction though... but if you want to find friends outside of school who have the same hobbies, using something like this would be a good idea, wouldn’t it?”

“...Hm.”

I see. This might be a good idea. It might be worth it to check this out right away.

“Alright, this was useful. Thanks, Manami.”

“... You’re welcome. Ehehe... so, I’ll see you tomorrow, at the same place as usual.”

⁴ I don’t have much experience with it, but I think Mixi is basically the Facebook of Japan.

Chapter 2:

Part 6

After cutting out the phone call, I stood up from the bed. Twirling the cell phone strap with my fingers for a bit, I put the phone in my back pocket. Leaving the room, I naturally headed for my sister's room.

Knock Knock Knock. I knocked three times. After waiting a bit, the door opened and my sister's face peeked out.

"Come in."

"Okay."

My sister beckoned me into the room... you know, I just realized it now, but this is only the fourth time I've been in my sister's room. Life is quite mysterious, isn't it... lots of things are mysterious.

"Sorry for the wait. I think I've hit on a good idea of how to make you otaku friends."

When I began to break it down for Kirino, for some reason she clicked her tongue as if displeased and sneered with a "umph."

"... You're full of it. In any case, why did you go crying to that plain-looking girl?"

"Don't call her that!! That might be a very appropriate description of her, but I won't tolerate anyone other than myself saying bad things about her."

"... What are you getting so angry for? You look like an idiot."

She murmured this while staring at me with disdain.

"But really, next time I really won't be able to hold myself back.¹ So don't say it again."

¹ He actually says he is going to smack Kirino next time... but this just sounds terribly harsh in English.

“Yeah yeah.”

Dammit, say it more sincerely, won’t you?² What’s with that disgusting attitude even though we’ve been working so hard just for your sake? Why do you look so annoyed all of a sudden... just a while ago when I left the room though, you seemed normal...

...Hm? Hm, could it be...

“...Just answer me one quick thing... do you hate Manami?”

“...Not really? I mean, I don’t really know her.”

That was true. She was my childhood friend, so it’s not like they’ve never met, but Kirino and Manami have rarely come into contact with each other. Every once a while, Manami would pass by Kirino when she came by the side of my house, but that was really it.

To be honest, just a while ago when Kirino passed by me and Manami, I don’t think Manami realized who Kirino even was. Even though their relationship was like that, there was no reason for Kirino to hate Manami, was there?

And, I mean, Manami is not the kind of person who incites hatred. Is she?

“...You were just being so lovey-dovey, I couldn’t stomach it.”

Ah, I see. Was that it? ...I have no idea what she’s talking about. I wasn’t being “lovey-dovey” at all...

We were giving off sparks, but it seemed that now we had settled into a tense peace.

Hmph. I guess I’ll be the mature one and give in. If I do say so myself, I’m being pretty generous here. Lovable guy, aren’t I?

“Well, Kirino, does it really matter whose idea this is? For now, just hear me out.”

² He says “It’s only one ‘yeah.’”

“... Fine. What is it?”

“Alright. So, do you know about SNS?”

When I told my sister Manami’s idea, that she should try to find some offline meetings to participate in, my sister shut up with a strange expression.

“... You don’t like it?”

“... It’s not... that...”

She looked downwards and thought for a few seconds, but before long raised her head and spoke.

“... I understand. Let’s try it.”

Oh? That was a pretty straightforward answer. How unexpected.

“You can access the sites on your phone too, I think.”

“I know already. Don’t come any closer.”

Kirino took out a cell phone from somewhere, and with a *tatatatatata*, began tapping away on the keys at incredible speed.

... Pretty amazing. I would definitely not be able to do that. I guess they do exist, these girls who are damn fast with their phones.

As these thoughts flew through my head, Kirino clicked her tongue.

“Tch. I registered but I need a referral letter from someone... this is pretty annoying...”

“You have a lot of friends at school, right? Just contact them through e-mail or whatever right now, and get a referral letter from someone who’s already a member.”

“Idiot. You’re really an idiot. You can’t mix my front and back sides, can you?³ If you did that, it would leave a trace.”

“I-I see...”

The two sides? ...Well, I guess the frontside would be the Kousaka Kirino who is a modern junior high school girl who models for teen magazines. And, the backside would be the Kousaka Kirino who loves little sisters and likes anime, and who really loves eroge. What a terrible gap between these two sides.

“Hmmm... well, there are SNS sites that are only for anime and games, right? Try to look for one that doesn’t need a referral letter.”

“... yeah yeah.”

As I gave my instructions, Kirino, seeming reluctant, fumbled around with her cell phone, and registered on an SNS site meant for otaku. And then, first she had to make her profile page.

“It’s asking you to input a username⁴. Pick one quickly.”

“Saying that to me... I can’t just decide one that quickly, can I?”

“This is something you can’t change later, right? You should pick a good one from the start, a good one. You could use other screen names as a reference too for what you can pick. See, look here, you have to enter in something @ something, here.”

As I was urging her on while peeking at her cell phone screen from her side, Kirino turned the cell phone away from my gaze, looking quite annoyed at my pushing. She entered in a username, and showed it to me.

“Alright, how’s this?”

³ The understanding is that the front is Kirino’s public identity, and the back is Kirino’s otaku identity.

⁴ The Japanese word for this is “handoru,” or “handle,” but I figured I’d go with the more American word “username” or “screenname.”

“... What exactly is this ‘Kiririn@this_guy_next_to_me_is_being_really_annothing [1]’ thing?”

“My screen name. Cute, isn’t it?”

It didn’t suit her at all... and also, was she trying to tick me off? That’s what she was trying to do, right? I’m going to seriously start crying with this treatment.

“H-hey... wait... if you write 14 in the ages column, it’s risky to put little sister eroge as a hobby, isn’t it?”

“But it’s the truth. This is my hidden side, remember? If I had gotten a referral letter from a classmate or a modeling friend, I wouldn’t be making this kind of profile.”

I guess. If I was reading a female classmate’s profile page, and saw her passion for eroge spelled out on it, I would burst out laughing.

Then, when I saw her the next day, I really wouldn’t be able to behave normally.

And that’s why, like you, she should keep this separate identity to be safe. That’s a good point.

But there was another thing that was bothering me...

“Hey, why have you been looking so down for a while now?”

“..... Well...”

As Kirino was carrying out my plan, she had seemed quite nervous.

Why was that? Straining my ears, I listened to my sister’s explanation.

“I mean... it’s just that I’m a bit scared of this type of social networking... I mean, in the end, the people with the same hobbies are going to be guys I think... and not only that, but older guys I think... this isn’t a stupid reason, right? I mean, it’s not that I don’t like this idea... but, I mean... I guess... I’m just a bit scared.”

“I see... that’s... how it is...”

It was a blind spot. This was quite a huge yet fundamental problem, wasn’t it? This was completely different than networking with classmates or her modeling friends. Forgetting that they’re otaku and so on, it must be frightening for a junior high school girl to make friends with older men. Even if it’s just online.

It would be all the more awkward to meet them in person... so really, in the end, she really had to look for girls of the same age who shared the same hobbies...

... Are there people like that? Junior high school girls who share the same hobbies as Kirino, are there really people like that?

I scratched my head in frustration. What should we do now?

“... So... could you... look for female-only groups? Might as well give it a try...”

“... I’ll try.”

Kirino started typing on her cell phone, searching for the right community. From her side as usual, I interjected.

“... What about... this one?”

“Hm?... Um, this one?”

“... Yeah. Heh, so these types of groups actually exist... click on it and check it out.”

The community we found was titled “Otaku Girls Unite!” There were around twenty members. Whether that was a lot or a little, I’m not sure, but it sort of had the feeling of a small club. To join the community, you have to write in your age and gender and send in a message asking to join, and if the admin denied your request you could not join. And, what’s more, there was a topic called “tea party invitation” visible. Because we weren’t members, we couldn’t see the actual details, but it seemed like the kind of offline meeting we were looking for.

“... Hey Kirino. This one might be alright.”

Even if there were guys posing as girls on this group, there’s no way they would go to an offline meeting for all girls. So that wouldn’t be a problem. I thought this was a perfect opportunity, but for some reason my sister’s expression was not as agreeable.

“Hm... uhh... yeah I see...”

“What’s wrong with you? Is there something else bothering you?”

“Not really, but...”

“Well, how about you send them a message to tell them you want to participate? Here, with this button.”

“Oh...”

Kirino stared at the message composition screen for a while, and then suddenly looked at me and asked this.

“... What exactly should I write?”

“Hmm. Well, you should just tell them your intentions, right? That you want girl friends who share the same hobby.”

Kirino nodded, wrote the message, and sent it.

Your message has been sent.

Seeing that notice, I felt that my duty was half completed.

If Kirino could make friends with girls who could understand her hobby... then I would be relieved from duty, so to speak.

This may be the last time I set foot in this room. After all, it was highly irregular of her to have picked me to give her life advice in the first place. I didn't think there would be any reason for us to hang out past this incident.

I mean, this is probably good. If we do end up returning to our old, rather dry relationship, there's no helping that. Hmm... well... if I had to tell the truth, it did make me feel a bit lonely. Just slightly.

In these few days, we've talked more to each other than we have in ten years.

And, I also discovered a surprising side of my sister.

It wasn't just her strange hobby. I also caught a glimpse at the hidden part of my little sister that got scared when she couldn't figure something out and gave up. It felt as if I was able to slightly feel the inner heart I could not hope to look into. So it wasn't all for naught. I mean, in the end... I guess I was a bit happy. Although I don't really understand any of it either.

"Alright then. So I only have to wait for a response..."

"Do your best, okay?"

"... Yeah."

Kirino nodded. I raised the corners of my lips and smiled.

For my little sister... if she could find friends better than me who she could have fun with, who she could chatter with without any restraint, that would be great.

But for just the small amount of time until then, I would fill that void in their place.



第三章

ore no imouto ga konnani kawaii wake ga nai

Chapter 3:

Part 1

The next day, the “Otaku Girls Unite!” admin sent us back a favorable reply.

When I returned home from school, I was dragged to Kirino’s room in the usual manner, and now, I was reading the response message from the community admin, whose user name was “Saori.”

"Nice to meet you, Kiririn-sama. My name is Saori, and I am acting as the administrator for the “Otaku Girls Unite!” community. I will not waste any time, so thank you very much for your message expressing your interest to join. Of course I will gladly approve your request. Given your age and hobbies, I am sure that we can become great friends. If you want... in a few days we are planning a meeting, and would be pleased if you could join us for tea. There are lots of things I want to talk about... please consider it. Until next time, thank you very much."¹

“So her username is ‘Saori,’ huh? ... Heh, this admin seems like a really polite person, doesn’t she?”

From the contents of that letter, I felt the air of a well brought up young woman. How do I say this... it exuded a smell of elegance. Was it just wishful thinking? No, my intuition told me that there was no mistaking this for a beautiful young woman.²

When she became conscious of how I was acting, Kirino looked at me as if she were looking at some unclean thing.

“... Gross. What are you grinning for?”

“I’m not grinning. I was just thinking that I’m glad she seems like a good person.”

¹ She is being rather formal in this letter. I tried to make it sound formal, but Japanese formality translates pretty poorly to English, considering there are like 50 levels of formality in Japanese.

² Bishoujo.

"Well... I guess. Seems sorta like a proper daughter from a high class family, doesn't she? ... I can't really imagine what that's like. There's nobody like that in my class."

That was true. Her friends, like her, were all the flashy type. They may have the looks and the refinement, but they're really hard to approach. They emit an air of not wanting to associate with anyone unlike them. It's as if they had thorns, and getting to close to them would leave you pricked.

"So, you're going to go, of course, right?"

"... Yeah. I'll do it."

Kirino nodded, but for some reason she seemed stiff. Geez, she's been acting like this for a while... it seems like there's still something she's worried about but is hiding from me. We've already solved the issue of her being afraid to make friends with older guys... what is there other than that? This bothered me, so I asked.

"Hey, there really is something still bothering you, isn't there?"

"Not really."

This attitude again. It looks like she really just doesn't want to say. So whatever, I won't do anything about it... although this is pretty annoying. Well, at the very least, I guess I can just continue to encourage you.

"I see. Well, do your best then."

"Huh? Why do you say that as if it's not your problem anymore?"

Kirino skewered me with a look as if I were a pig. I threw her a piece of warm encouragement there, but why is it that all I got in return was cold disdain? That was definitely not a fair trade.

As I creased my eyebrows, Kirino faced me and spoke.

“The life advice session continues.”

She muttered this quickly. She then spoke, as if she were giving me a perfectly natural order.

“Come with me to the meeting.”

... What the hell is she saying, this girl...

“... Uhh, how exactly do you want me, a guy, to participate in an all girl meetup?”

“What if you crossdress?”

“Definitely not! You say that so casually, but if I’m discovered, wouldn’t they make me out to be some pervert who wanted to take such a huge risk just to go to an all girl meeting?!”

“I’m prepared to take whatever risk, so it’ll be alright.”

“This isn’t your problem! It’s about me! I have absolutely no desire to carry the dishonour of being labelled a pervert! It’s not alright at all!”

That about sums it up.

“Also, if I were to dress like a girl, I’d definitely be discovered in an instant.”

“... I see. I guess that’s true...”

It seemed like Kirino finally agreed with my reasoning. Nodding earnestly a few times, she pursed her lips and grumbled.

“... Why couldn’t you have been born with better looks?”

“Don’t make me smack you, asshole! Out of all the things you’ve said, that one was the worst! Stop looking at me like you’re pitying me or something!”

At my complaint, Kirino turned her gaze, annoyed, and clicked her tongue.

“I guess it can’t be helped... Well, should we go for a more direct plan of attack then?”

“You make it sound like I’m the one who really wants to go and am asking you for a favor or something... well whatever, I’ll listen for now so go on. What do you mean by ‘more direct plan’?”

“Well, what if I sent this Saori-san a message saying ‘I know a person (he’s 17 and a guy), and for some reason he insisted that he wants to go to an all girl tea party. He looks really lonely so would it be alright if I brought him along?’ Or something like that.”

“All that does is make me an open pervert instead of a sneaky one.”

And I mean, they would probably reject such a proposal. It was an all girl’s meeting, so bringing a guy would be very frowned upon.

I told this to Kirino, and her mood darkened. Biting her lower lip, she glared at me.

“... So, what are we going to do?”

“As I said, going with you to this meeting would be impossible... come on, stop glaring at me like that. Uhh... hold on... hmm...”

I looked at the “Otaku Girls Unite!” community page.

Clicking on the topic about the offline meeting, the details of the meetup were displayed.

“See, this place... it’s a café right? It’s not like you need a reservation, right? So then, I’ll go with you and sit in a seat next to yours. It’s not like I can talk to you from there, but at least I can watch you.”

I mean, this was my idea, but just sitting at a table next to her probably wasn’t what she wanted.

I was expecting her to respond with her usual scorn and disdain, but suddenly...

“... I understand. That’s fine.”

I don’t know why, but Kirino was sincerely nodding her head. Surprised, my eyes widened.

“I-I see.”

Incidentally, Kirino never really made it clear why she wanted me to go with her, did she? But it’s a bit too late to ask that now... but it’s alright if I’m just there with her, even if I can’t participate...? I have no idea what’s going on...

Well, anyways, that’s how it was. Next Sunday, I would go with my sister to the “Otaku Girls Unite!” community offline meeting, and would watch over her from the shadows.

Chapter 3:

Part 2

In no time at all, the day for the offline meeting arrived.

We rode a train from the nearest station for around an hour and a half. Right now, we were standing at the Akihabara Electric City exit on the JR line.¹

It was just past noon on a holiday. I was expecting something consistent with the rumors, that Akiba² would be messy and congested, but it wasn't really like that. At least inside and in front of the station, it gave off an impression of a well-maintained, orderly place.

"It's a radio studio! And a gamer's flagship store! ... Ooo"

Kirino tried to restrain her voice, but couldn't completely hide her excitement.

... She sure is having fun, isn't she? It seems like, just like me, this is her first time in Akihabara.

Up to now, her experience with Tokyo has been limited to Shibuya and Harajuku, I think³. She might have a lot of anime goods, but as an otaku she might be a relative beginner. I checked the time on my cell phone.

"Hey, Kirino. This isn't the time for that, alright? If you want to go to the shops, do that after the meetup."

"I know, I know. By the way, don't stick so close to me. I don't want people to think that we're on a date or something."

"..."

¹ JR refers to Japan Rail, the major operator of train and subways in Japan, and especially in Tokyo. Akihabara is a subway stop, and also the electric district of Tokyo. It is also known for being the world capital of anime goods.

² Shortened form of Akihabara.

³ Two districts in Tokyo, both very big on youth fashion. Shibuya is known for large fashion stores, while Harajuku is known more for fashion subcultures like gothic lolita.

As she uttered those cruel words to me, Kirino seemed to be tensely preparing for her first offline meeting. Her shoulders were held high, and she was wearing clothes that made her seem very mature. Underneath, she had on a miniskirt and boots. But she also wore a good deal of expensive-looking accessories.

Even to someone like me, who did not really understand fashion, she looked quite stylish.

She looked more suited for somewhere like Shibuya or Odaiba⁴.

She looked so mismatched from the guy in a plain shirt and jeans walking next to her.

But I mean... it's already too late so I won't say anything, but... going to the meeting in that getup... I mean, certainly it's pretty cute, but... will you really be alright like that?

"Alright. Then from here on let's split up a bit. You were supposed to meet up here, right? I'll head off to the café first and I'll be on standby there."

"Huh? Ah... alright. I got it."

"Don't look so disheartened. I'll definitely be watching out for you."

"... I-I don't look like that at all. Don't be an idiot, shouldn't you be going?"

"Yeah, yeah. Well, see ya."

Lightly raising a hand as a goodbye, I turned my back on my sister.

Passing by the shop Kirino had called a gamer's flagship store, I went out into the main street. Soon, I could see various games and cords and such lined up in the storefronts that I passed by, although with such a brief glance I didn't really know what exactly they were selling. I was reminded of a cheap sweets shop I used to

⁴ Odaiba is an island accessible via bridge in Tokyo that holds a lot of attractions, including a bustling shopping district, an amusement park, and the Tokyo Big Sight Convention Center.

pass by often as a kid. I didn't really plan on buying anything, but I still felt a fluttering of excitement.

... It's pretty lively around here, isn't it?

As expected, it was pretty busy here. At its most busiest times, Akihabara's main street even had places where bands would play. Compared to that, I would say that today's atmosphere was somewhat more subdued, but...

... It's really like a festival around here, isn't it?

That's really what I thought.

As I was admiring my surroundings, I took out a printout map from the bag hanging from my shoulders and looked at it.

... Ah, this isn't the right street at all. It's in the opposite direction.

I turned around in order to retrace my steps, but I saw Kirino still standing there. Having gallantly come this far, it just wouldn't do if I made a U-turn now. Without facing the main street, with its row of electronics stores, I turned left. I made another left at the intersection, and continued straight. I passed under a railway bridge and still continued, and soon I could see a thin tall building on my right.

It was the Shosen Book Tower, according to my map. The influence of otaku culture seemed to lighten here, and the surroundings gave off an impression not unlike what you would find outside a very normal train station.

I crossed the pedestrian crosswalk, and came to a stop close to the entrance of the Book Tower.

... Hmm, it's this way, right?

Like that, I continued to follow the road. Following the map, after walking for a few minutes, it looked like I had entered into what looked to be, judging from the houses around me, a quiet residential neighborhood. If the map was correct, the café would be right around here...

“Ah, here it is.”

I stopped, and looked up at a building that looked a bit like a lodge. The café was named “Pretty Garden,” and its exterior gave off the impression of an elegant little cabin. After I went up the very short staircase, I opened the wooden door and was greeted by the pleasant sound of a bell.

Ring ring.

“Welcome home, master!”⁵

I was greeted simultaneously by the voices of many aproned maids.

Trying hard to pretend that nothing had happened, I shut the door again.

“.... Wh... Wh-wh-what... is going on...?”

Still holding onto the door with both hands, I muttered to myself. No, it was clear what was going on. I knew what was going on... but... seriously, just wait a bit. My mind still hasn't quite caught up to the situation yet.

Because the neighborhood outside had seemed so normal, I had completely forgotten that I was still in Akiba...

So, the rumors were true... this was... what do they call it...

Was this a maid café?!

Finally having come to this realization, I took stock of my situation in my head.⁶

Inhaling and giving a huge sigh, I timidly opened the door a second time.

Ring ring.

⁵ “Okaerinasaimase, goshujinsama!” It is the standard greeting for all maid cafes.

⁶ He says something like “In my head, I verbalized a response,” which I interpreted to mean “In my head, I took stock of the situation.”

“Welcome home, master!”

It was the same scene as before... Damn, it wasn't an illusion, was it?

To welcome me, a cute maid-san approached with a pitter patter.

She was wearing a fluffy white apron. Her skirt was excessively short, although her socks were very long.

It was definitely an outfit that was designed for cuteness.

I couldn't help feeling that I wanted to get out of here, but I had made a promise to come here and be on standby. What's more, turning back here would just not do at all. I braced myself and took a step into the café.

Kousaka Kyousuke. Seventeen years old. My first time at a maid café...

“Is it just one guest, master?”

“Y-yeah...”

“Well, then, please come this way~”

I was lead by the maid-san to a table for one. The interior of the place had the look of a normal coffee shop. The slightly dim shop was illuminated by a number of orange lamps. The furniture all somehow looked like antiques, and the atmosphere felt really Western. Also, even though it was lunchtime, the place was relatively empty. Maybe the people who were going to the offline meeting had reserved a lot of tables.

“Would this seat suit you?”⁷

“Yeah... uh, thanks.”

⁷ There are going to be formal elements of the maids' dialogue that don't translate well to English, but I'll try my best.

The maid-san pulled the seat out for me, and I sat down. I felt quite self-conscious.

Every maid in the place certainly was quite cute.

“Here is the menu, master~~. Could I take your order for how you want to be addressed?”

“Huh? Wh-what do you mean?”

“Well~~, please decide how you would like me to address you. On the menu, you can see all sorts of options like “master,” “danna,” “-kun,” “-chan,” “oniichan,” “oniisama,” and others~~.”⁸

... Maid cafés are really terrifying. Hahaha... how is a mere high school student supposed to get through this?

I couldn’t help but laugh a bit more. Well, let’s just let nature take its course. Putting on a bold smile, I responded.

“... Uh, it doesn’t matter. Whichever is fine.”

“Is that so? Then, how about I call you oniichan? Oniichan~~”

Well, now the maid-san was being a bit overly familiar with me. I guess it would be a bit boorish for me to point out that at this point, she didn’t seem like a maid at all anymore... and what’s more, it was obvious that she was over twenty years old...

“Did you say something, onii-chan?”

“No no!”

⁸ Danna is just another word for master with slightly different connotations. Oniichan and oniisama are words for “big brother,” although oniisama is more formal. –kun and –chan are both rather familiar honorifics, with –chan being a bit more formal.

How terrifying. Was she reading my mind or something? I wiped my forehead with the back of my hand, and the maid brought over some water. As I gratefully sated my thirst, I looked at the menu.

I had yet to eat lunch, so let's see what I could fill up on... and...

"..."

With a bewildered expression, I glanced roughly at the menu items. Why was I confused, you ask?

Well... that is... for now, let me give you a few examples.

♥ Lunch ♥

The maid's lovey dovey omelette rice (ketchup or otafuku) - 900 yen.⁹

Little sister's handmade curry (parupunte flavor, begiragon flavor, zaraki flavor) – 1000 yen.¹⁰

The tsundere¹¹ school president's specially prepared ramen – 800 yen.

♥ Drinks ♥

Spirit of Saiyan – 300 yen. Super holy water – 300 yen. Juice from the divine essence tree – 300 yen.¹²

I have no idea what's going on. At least the lunch items sound similar to actual food items, so whatever, but I can't even begin to imagine what any of those drinks are. What should I do?

⁹ I had to look this up, but Otafuku is apparently a Japanese company that produces various sauces.

¹⁰ Alright... extensive google searching has told me that these three words are names of Dragon Quest spells... Parupunte produces a random effect in battle, Begiragon is a high level fire spell, and Zaraki is a death spell. I guess that these descriptors indicate the level of spice in the curry.

¹¹ Tsundere refers to a type of anime character that is outwardly very cold (tsun) but also has a very soft side (dere).

¹² These are all dragon ball references. Someone shoot me now...

I guess I have no choice but to ask.

“Excuse me... what exactly is this... spirit... of... saiyan?”

“That would be vegetable juice, oniichan~”

Then write “vegetable juice,” dammit... but of course I didn’t say that. The menu was what the menu was, I guess.

I also ascertained that “Super holy water” just meant “cider” and “Juice from the divine essence tree” just meant “mixed fruit juice.”

“Have you decided on your order? Oniichan.”

“Not yet... sorry.”

In my confusion, I stupidly apologized...

“By the way, I have a recommendation. You should try the little sister’s handmade curry. I made it with my own hands, oniichan ♡.”

“A-alright, then I’ll go with that.”

Dammit. This damn girl, picking out the most expensive thing on the menu so casually... although, it really was my fault for going along with it...

“Your order has been entered in~. Little sister’s handmade curry. Zaraki flavor~”

Zaraki flavor, huh? That sounds pretty dangerous... Well, whatever.

But, still, what they bring out to me might be completely inedible...

“Hah... well, whatever.”

Having exhausted myself just by ordering, I took a breather.

Tilting my chair backwards, I stared at the ceiling.

Then, the door once again opened, and a group of people entered.

Ring ring.

“Welcome home, master!”

Ah, so they came. I took out a baseball cap from my bag, and wore it low over my eyes.

Nonchalantly, I turned my gaze towards the door.

In succession, a group of girls entered. I still couldn’t see Kirino. Hm... as I thought, they were relatively plain looking... at the risk of sounding a bit rude, most of them really didn’t seem very refined.

There were also a few girls here or there in cosplay... hm?

Whoa... what’s up with that one?!

Although I didn’t say this out loud, you could argue that I was being a bit too rude. But, after seeing *that*, could you really say that? I turned my gaze to the girl (?) that stood at the front of the group.

Well, let’s see... first thing’s first. She was huge. Really huge. Seriously big.

Just making a rough estimate, she had to be around 180 cm tall.¹³ Well, I mean, if that was the only thing I was looking at, she may have looked like a supermodel... but what was more startling was her getup. She looked extremely like an otaku.

Her head was wrapped in a bandana, and she wore a pair of twirly eyeglasses. What’s more, she wore a checkered long-sleeve shirt, tucked into a pair of trousers. She also bore a rough-looking backpack on her back.

To make matters worse, a number of rolled up posters poked out from her backpack.

¹³ Around 5 feet 11 inches.

... To sum it up... she was the image of the stereotypical otaku that I had seen on TV, while having a figure like a supermodel...

I'm not lying. I really didn't believe it myself, but there she was, right in front of me.

Heh, Tokyo is truly a frightening place, isn't it? I've definitely learned that today.

Feeling myself getting agitated, I gulped down some water in an attempt to calm myself.

And in front of my eyes, that aforementioned huge girl began to talk to one of the maids.

"I have a reservation for 1 PM, please."¹⁴

... Geez, she really has an incredibly strange way of speaking, this big one.

The maid didn't even flinch, exuding an impressive air of professionalism.

"Alright. Would you please give me your name?"

"Saori Bajeena."

Wha-?! I did a spit take, and held my throat, coughing violently.

Hack! Hack! Cough! Cough! Hack!

"Ah! A-are you alright, oniichan?"

The maid-san patted me on the back as I continued to cough in agony. Damn, that definitely went down the wrong pipe! *Hack! Cough! Hack!* Dammit, I feel like I'm going to die...

¹⁴ Saori refers to herself as "sessha," which is a really archaic formal way to refer to yourself. Also, it's a pronoun that is generally used by males. Saori also uses "degozaru" which is highly formal and very strange in this setting. I really don't know how to translate these things into English.

But I can't die before making a comment here.

This was the person with the username "Saori"?! But, Bajeena... wasn't she Japanese?!

Ah, I know. It was just her alias in the online community.

I mean, even I could understand that people often had different identities online and in real life. But no matter how you looked at it, her name was obviously fake.

And she also wasn't quite the prim and proper lady that I had imagined her to be...

She really fell very short of that expectation! This was perhaps the biggest surprise I've had in all my 17 years of life!

Well, this was a bit of a dreadful outcome right from the start, wasn't it? What the hell. I haven't even talked to her, and yet I'm making such nasty comments already...

Cough. Cough. Cough. "Thanks... sorry for being so noisy."

"Oh no, it's fine~. Alright, I'll go get another water for you, kay? But oniichan? If you do that again I'll get angry, okay? ♥."

Blop. The maid tapped my head lightly with her fist. Even in such unexpected situations, she didn't panic and stayed in character. She's really a seasoned pro, isn't she?

"Yeah... I really am very sorry..."

I blushed through teary eyes. And I realized that all the eyes in the place were now looking at me.

I felt the jealous stares of the other guys here and there in the bar, as if they wanted to say "Well aren't you pretty clever?"

No no! It wasn't like it was on purpose! Ah, damn, I suddenly feel so uncomfortable here...

Ring ring. Turning my gaze once again to the entrance, I saw Kirino crossing her arms and giving me a fierce glare, as if to say "why the hell are you being so conspicuous, idiot?!" Well, I couldn't help it, could I?! It was all Bajeena's fault!

I tried to explain it to her just with my eyes, but...

"...Hmph."

Whether she understood what I was trying to say or not, Kirino quickly turned the other way.

... But seriously... she really doesn't fit in with that crowd...

Excluding the big one, the girls of the "Otaku Girls Unite!" group, whether they looked plain or were wearing some kind of cosplay, all looked like quite docile girls. Also, there were barely any who had dyed their hair.

Mixed into the middle of that group, there was a teen model (light brown hair) who had obviously tried very hard to coordinate her clothes... she really stood out.

As the community members were standing near the entrance awaiting further instruction, two maids went up to them and bowed.

"We are very sorry about the wait~. Please allow us to lead you to your seats~~."

At the maids' directions, the group slowly entered into the middle of the café.

Kirino and the others were shown to the very middle of the café. A number of other tables were attached to that one, and chairs were brought and placed appropriately.

The group split up into smaller groups of 10 or so, and picked their seats while chatting away. From the bit of conversation I could overhear, it appeared that this

was this group's first offline meeting. So, this was probably the first time any of these girls were meeting in person.

“...”

... Isn't Kirino a bit cut off from the rest of the group...?

In one corner, Kirino was sitting by herself. Her posture was strangely stiff, and she was anxiously looking around. It was like in elementary school, when people separate into groups of friends, but one person ends up being left out...

Man, this was a pretty miserable situation... I felt a pang in my chest as I clenched my teeth.

“Umm...”

In that state, as soon as Kirino tried to timidly strike up a conversation, the same conversation would end after two or three words.

It seems like Kirino was wary of her companions, and they thought the same of her. Even though this was a group that presumably shared a hobby, it didn't seem that way at all. It was as if her words just weren't getting heard... or if there was an invisible wall...

I clicked my tongue.

Well... it's not like I wasn't vaguely expecting something like this to happen...

Kirino had always exuded a haughty aura that screamed “Servant, don't come near me.”

She seemed like the type who would push away anybody who wasn't similarly beautiful and refined as she.

Of course, that's fine at school. There are people of all sorts at school, and it wasn't difficult to form a group with similar people and hang out with them.

But Kirino, at school, was not only part of the most popular group, but was a leader of sorts in that group. In that position, it was good that she could so carefully pick her clothes and be so charming.

This aura of a cold princess that she exuded helped her charm and attract people with similar sensibilities.

But, here, the people were not that way at all. Here, the people that Kirino was trying to make friends with were completely different than the people in the crowd she hung out with at school. That was pretty obvious.

It was as if in the middle of a flock of sheep, the wolf who wanted to make friends with the sheep had been left out.

No matter how desperately the wolf tried to speak, the sheep would get nervous, and would think “why is this wolf mixed in with our flock?”

“...”

Irritated, I bit my lip. ... Ah, Kirino ran away from another conversation. She really can't hold a conversation for longer than two or three words, can she? Whomever she was talking to would nod idly for a bit, and then get drawn in to another group's conversation, and would stop talking to Kirino.

... And anyways, from what I could overhear, I really had no idea what any of these people were talking about.

It felt like I had gotten lost in a foreign country or something...

As I rubbed my forehead and let out a sigh, Kirino looked in my direction as if asking for help.

... Don't look at me with such a miserable expression... That's so not like you!

I began to clench my fists, and then...

“Sorry to keep you waiting! Your little sister's hand-made curry is here, oniichan!”

“Ah, thanks.”

This damn maid... she really chose a great time to bring this to me, didn't she? Oh God, my sister just heard this maid call me “oniichan,” didn't she?! Agh, how terrible!

Someone please kill me! As I trembled out of embarrassment, I looked at my sister. It seemed that she hadn't been looking this way, but it was all the same to me. Clenching my fists, I put all my energy into watching her table.

Hey, Kirino, I really can't do anything in this position. But, I'll definitely watch you from here.

Do your best! Do your best, Kirino...! Do your best! Pointlessly, I continued to try to send my words of encouragement to her.

Dammit...

What was that crap about “hand-made”? This taste, this curry obviously came from a can, didn't it...?!

Chapter 3:

Part 3

The offline meeting continued for around two hours, and ended with what looked to be a gift exchange.

Of course, without being able to communicate effectively with anyone at all, Kirino had not managed to make a single friend...

What's more, the final blow came when Kirino received her gift from the present exchange, and it turned out to be some shabby toy magic hand.¹

Wh... what the hell was this? No matter how you looked at it, that was just a bit...

It didn't have to be a perfect gift, but seriously, shouldn't you prepare a more serious present?

Feeling all alone and looking downwards, my sister dejectedly opened and closed the magic hand, and I couldn't help but pity her a bit.

... Dammit, I really might cry...

In all my seventeen years of life, has there ever been a scene that has been so depressing as this?

I was now outside the café, standing only slightly removed from the gathered girls.

And then, the community leader and also the organizer of this offline meeting, Saori, began to make her closing remarks.

"Thank you all for your cooperation in making this first memorable tea gathering pleasant and seeing it through to a safe conclusion! From me, I offer you the most heartfelt thanks."

¹ One of those things where you pull a lever on one end and the claw at the other end opens and closes.

The crowd raised a delighted cheer. As expected from a community leader, her appearance and manner of speech gave her a commanding air, not unlike a teacher talking to his students.

"With that, this tea meeting has come to a close! We can now go on each of our ways, but because the day is still young, please continue to congregate with friends you have made! Also, as for the next official event, I will post up a topic on the community boards, and be sure to attend that one as well! Alright then... dismissed!"

With that, the crowd came to life. Farewells flew left and right, along with invitations, with a "hey, do you want to head to Toranoana² now?" here to a "where do you want to go?" there to a "hey, let's go and talk seriously about those Seed couplings³" somewhere else.

But, in that energetic throng, my sister, Kirino, was nowhere to be found.

In groups of two or three, the larger group dispersed.

Also, Saori, after giving her farewell speech, made a mad dash out of there.

Did she have some urgent business to attend to?

Like that, the area slowly emptied of people, leaving a lone Kirino standing stock still in the middle. She may have been hopeful that someone would invite her to go with them, and would not allow herself to give up. Now, looking completely exhausted, she dropped her shoulders. Her cute clothes, which she had so carefully picked for today, had been exposed as being completely ineffective... In fact, they may have had the opposite effect to what she intended.

It was a scene of a desolate battlefield, with the wasted arrows and broken blades of the losing army strewn about. And in her hand she still grasped that magic hand.

² A rather big manga and doujinshi shop along the main avenue of Akihabara. It's quite nice – I blew way too much money there.

³ I am going to guess that they are talking about Gundam SEED.

Slowly, I took off my baseball cap and approached my dejected-looking sister.

“... Don’t say anything... you definitely tried your best.”

I tried to place a hand on her head in comfort, but it was quickly swept away.

... Yeah, yeah, I know you don’t want to be pitied.

With her head turned downwards like that, I couldn’t see her face, but...

You really have to face it and try to put on a brave face here. This time was a bit of a misfire, but you learn from your mistakes and get back on your feet. And however many times, you should be up to take the challenge again. Right?

“Alright, Kirino. We’ve finally gotten to Akiba. Let’s go look around for a bit.”

Lightly striking Kirino on the back, I finally got back the abuse I was expecting.

“The hell... idiot... Also, why did you suddenly start choking on your water back then?”

“Well, I mean, I really couldn’t help it.”

As we were exchanging this nonsense talk, Kirino suddenly gave a huge sigh.

“... I couldn’t talk to them at all.”

“... Yeah, I saw. Well, this was your first time after all. Don’t worry about it.”

“... It’s not that... Wh-why...? I... was just trying to act normally... why were they avoiding me? Ooh... I’m so annoyed... so annoyed. Annoyed annoyed annoyed...”

Looking truly irritated, Kirino ground her teeth while stamping her feet.

“...”

It's not like I could blame her. I've also been in situations like this. Sometimes, when I was frustrated or depressed, I couldn't find any way to distract myself other than changing those feelings into anger...

But, I had pretty good knowledge of my sister's anger... especially since she started kicking me out of anger just now. I'm not a wall, you know? If you kick me, you'll hurt me.

But I won't get angry! It hurts me when you do that, but I know you're hurting too, so I'll be patient with you today.

"Ow!!! This kid... stop using your heel so much! Dammit, can I really be patient with this?! I really can't tolerate this much longer!"

In that way, I continued to frantically try to tolerate Kirino's outburst.

Suddenly, an unexpected figure appeared.

"Ooi! Kiririn-shi! ... Phew, I'm glad! You're still here!"

"Ah... you're... Saori-san...?"

Panting from having run all the way here, the community leader Saori stood before us.

"Hey, hey, what's with that 'Saori-san'? It's as if Kiririn-shi doesn't know me or something! It's perfectly alright if you drop the 'san.' Ahhh, but I'm glad I caught you. I was just about to try to reach you by cell phone, too."

Saori smiled widely. But man, she's really high strung, isn't she? With her strange style of speaking⁴, even though I could understand her from a distance, now that she was talking with me here I really didn't know how to respond.

From her appearances, Kirino was equally stumped, and timidly tried her best to respond.

⁴ Once again, and this is the absolute last time I'm going to mention this, Saori has a really strange manner of speaking in Japanese. She uses a lot of very stilted formal speech and lots of archaic male pronouns.

“W-what did you want with me?”

“Ah.”

Saori nodded and her mouth went like this :3.⁵ For someone with such a build, she could do cute things like this too. Her face was half hidden behind her swirl glasses, but up close I could tell that her features were definitely not bad. Unlike a certain someone, if she took off her glasses she may as well have been a beautiful woman.

Leaving that aside, Saori held up one finger and said this.

“Truth is, I wanted to invite you to another gathering.”

“Huh?”

Kirino looked bewildered at the strange invitation. Right after she made this statement, Saori turned her swirl eyeglasses to me.

“Kiririn-shi, by the way, who is this fellow? If I’m not mistaken, earlier he was in the shop watching yo... ahhh, I see...”

“Definitely not!”

Kirino and I raised our objection at the same time. Of all things, what in the world are you thinking?!

“So, I was mistaken? I apologize then... it’s just that this fellow a little while ago was intently staring at Kiririn-shi inside the shop, right? I was so certain that it was the gaze of a lover...”

“There’s no way!! Stop that!! Just thinking about that grosses me out!!”

Wow, my sister is pretty annoyed... isn’t there some nicer way you could tell her she’s wrong, though?

⁵ Yes, there is literally a picture of a curly shape in the novel.

While I was thinking these things, I added on my own thoughts.

“I’m Kousaka Kyousuke, and I want to clear up the fact that I’m her brother. Please don’t make any bad assumptions.”

“Oh hoh, I see I see, you’re Kiririn-shi’s... sibling, although you look nothing like her.”

Dammit, leave me alone.

Nodding in understanding, Saori faced me and gave me a light bow.

“Alright, my mistake then. I think you already know this then, but my name is Saori Bajeena. Please call me Saori. Nin.”⁶

“... Thanks. That’s very considerate...”

And, nin? Geez, her manner of speaking is seriously otaku-ish, isn’t it? And what’s with those weird first-person pronouns?⁷ (7)

As I was making these remarks in my head, I returned her bow.

“Well, well, Kyousuke-shi – you won’t mind if I call you Kyousuke-shi – Would Kyousuke-shi like to come with us?”

“Would I mind... you mean, to the meeting?”

“Of course! How about it?”

Whoa, suddenly her face came really close to mine.

I took a step back in surprise, and in my place Kirino began to speak with a slightly uneasy tone of voice.

⁶ Saori says “nin!” at the end of her sentence here, which is apparently some ninja stereotype, and Saori is trying to impersonate this. Whatever, sappari wakaranai.

⁷ As mentioned before, Saori uses “sessha” which is really archaic. Here she also uses “wagahai,” which is also very outdated and also was predominantly used by males. Saori should take pity on this poor translator and stop speaking such weird Japanese.

“Um... this meeting... will there be a lot of other people?”

In other words, she doesn't really want to go, does she? And I understand why. If she goes and feels left out again, it would hardly be a good time.

And, in Kirino's case, because she was pretty spoiled in general, this was very hard for her.

But, with a “oh no no,” Saori shook her head back and forth in a hugely exaggerated way. She put up four fingers on one hand and spoke.

“Including Kiririn-shi and Kyousuke-shi, there are only four people. It's a meeting for people I had wanted to talk to, to make friends with, but didn't have a chance to. I guess for a ‘gathering,’ it's a bit small. Let's go chat a bit at a McDonalds, and then go shopping together. How about it?”

“U-uh...”

After hearing the details, Kirino seemed a bit interested and began to think about it.

If it's like this, then she wouldn't be left out of the group, so it should be fine, right?

That's what Kirino was probably thinking.

After realizing this, because I felt I should encourage Kirino a bit, I faced Saori and spoke.

“I don't mind, but it depends on what she says.”

“Hm, well how about it? Kiririn-shi?”

“U-uh...”

Showing us her thinking face, after acting like she was thinking hard about it, Kirino blushed.

“A-alright. If you put it like that... I’ll go then... for your sake.”

Her words sounded so childish that it was very difficult to restrain my laughter.

Kirino had always acted mature for her age, but every once in a while she showed her younger side, and the cuteness made me smile.

“Ahh, then that’s good! Well, let’s go! The last member of our gathering is already waiting at the McDonalds.”

Removing one of her posters from her backpack as if unsheathing a lightsaber, Saori pointed straight ahead.

Saori – the huge girl who dressed like an otaku. The community leader with weird speech patterns.

Honestly, I can’t think of any way to describe her other than weird... but... maybe...

If she weren’t really the way she was through and through, then it’s unlikely she could be as respected as a leader of the otaku community.

Chapter 3: Part 4

With that, we set off to meet this last person.

We were now seated on the second floor at the McDonalds nearest the Pretty Garden café¹, on a couch in one of the corners. Two tables were joined end to end, so four people could sit down together.

Kirino and I were sitting side by side, Saori was across from me, and the last person at the meeting was sitting across from Kirino. There were drinks set in front of each seat. Kirino, Saori, and I had just come up from the first floor after buying drinks a few seconds ago, and had just met this fourth person.

But since all four of us had gathered here, not one person had said anything.

... But, this last person... she was also really strange, although not in the same way as Saori.

As soon as I saw her, my eyes widened.

Although, I couldn't really see her face... in the corner seat across from Kirino, she was fiddling with her cell phone.

Because she was motionlessly looking downwards, I couldn't see her face, but she definitely had a beautiful head of black hair.

But... she was one of those cosplayers, wasn't she...

Her clothes were pitch black. Things that looked like rose blossoms were attached everywhere, giving her an excessively extravagant look. She really looked like she was going to a ball or something.

“It’s been on my mind for a while, but... when I look at you closely... that’s a really great Suigintou,² isn’t it...”

¹ The maid café they had been at previously.

² Rozen Maiden character.

At least, those were Kirino's impressions. But, whatever you might think, Kirino, she stands out in an entirely different way than you do...

I had no idea what she was cosplaying, but however I looked at it this just went way overboard... She was taking cosplay a bit too seriously...

As soon as she saw that all of us had sat down, Saori began to introduce us two.

"These two are Kiririn-shi and, as a special guest, her older brother Kyousuke-shi. And, this is a member of my community-"

"... My username is Kuroneko."³

The final person at the meeting raised her head and vacantly introduced herself.

What an emotionless, indifferent manner of speaking.

"Um... I'm Kiririn. N-nice to meet you."

Kirino spoke nervously. It was a nervousness that didn't really suit her, but this was probably how she felt during the offline meeting too.

"I'm Kousaka Kyousuke. Sorry for intruding on this meeting so suddenly."

Following this, having introduced myself like my sister, and a gloomy voice responded.

"... I see. Well, for the time being, nice to meet you."

She spoke bluntly, but this black haired Gothic Lolita girl ⁴ was really quite a beauty.

Although, her personality did not match Kirino's at all.

³ This translates roughly to black cat, but since this is the name that she is known by the community, I will continue to refer to her as Kuroneko throughout this translation.

⁴ A fashion trend, with preference for darker colors. Google it if you're curious.

Her bangs consisted of long black hair. Her skin, pure white. Her eyes, long and thin. She had a beauty mark under her left eye.

I'm not sure if this is the right way to say it, but she was a somewhat ghost-like Japanese-style beauty.

The red contacts she had put in also probably were a part of the cosplay.

From the looks of it, she also seemed to have a difficult, gloomy personality... in this atmosphere, I was half-expecting her to start using black magic. She was definitely pretty, but she had none of the charm that Kirino had, and a foreboding aura rose up from her entire body.⁵

"... Everyone seems to be here, so I'll ask quickly... what exactly is your intention for inviting me to a place like this, manager-san?"

"Ha ha ha. Didn't I tell you before? I wanted to invite you to a little afterparty. Ahh, but that was a pretty close call! The minute I finished speaking, you started briskly walking away, so I had to run after you! Geez, if I didn't do that, I wouldn't have been able to invite you!"

Saori repeatedly nudged the Goth Lolita girl, but she remained completely expressionless. Since we first saw her, she had not changed her facial expression in the slightest... it was really eerie.

But I understand now, this is probably why Saori took off running earlier.

... I see. Gradually, I'm starting to see what Saori is trying to do here... But, Kirino and this Gothic Lolita girl... the reason she deliberately picked these two to bring here, I still didn't really know...

Perhaps it was that this meeting was organized by the community manager Saori for the sake of the attendees at the offline meeting who failed at making many friends.

⁵ Kyousuke says that "black minus vectors" are coming off of Kuroneko. This is a bit difficult to envision in English though.

That's why there were no others here.

As Saori had said, it was a meeting “for people I had wanted to talk to, to make friends with, but didn’t have a chance to,” right?

That’s a nice way to put it. Hmm. You couldn’t tell by looking at her, but she really knew how to take care of people in a discreet way, didn’t she?

And, also, she never asked exactly why I had been accompanying Kirino, and furthermore received me as a “special guest,” so she probably had vaguely guessed what I was doing there.

So really... hah... just as her appearance would suggest, she was a pretty charitable person.

Slurp.

Still having not let her guard down, Kirino silently sipped at her soda.

It seemed like Kirino had not yet realized what was going on... but “Kuroneko” I think had already figured it out.

That might have been why she suddenly looked so ill at ease after first seeing us.

On the one hand, I would be grateful, but on the other hand, once I guessed Saori’s intentions, no matter how I looked at it I felt like I was being pitied. It was an incredibly difficult situation.

Kuroneko’s inner thoughts were probably pretty complicated. Honestly, my mood was also a bit complicated right now.

If I were Saori, I wouldn’t have taken the effort to call out to the people who weren’t fitting in at the first meeting.

The people who weren’t doing well at the first meeting would probably not go to the next meeting, right? As Saori, I really would have been fine with that.

That's what I thought at least. So really, this big girl was a pretty good person, wasn't she?

"By the way, stop it with the manager-san and the reserved manners. Just feel free to call me "Saori" please, Kuroneko-shi. We all went through the trouble of meeting here, so let's drop the formality and have fun."

"How could you dare to call yourself 'Saori' with that body? How shameless."

The minute Saori gave out this invitation to drop formality, this Gothic Lolita had to say such a thing.

"Hey hey, that's the first time someone's said something like that to me."

"But it's true, isn't it? When you're online, you put on that 'pure princess' act, and that username suits you well⁶ ... but really, it's like this, isn't it? However you look at it, you're a fraud. It's unfortunately laughable. I'm just trying to give you honest advice, so just change your name to "Andre"⁷ after this, alright? In that case, there would be no problem... and also, what's with that weird outfit and weird way of talking? ... with the 'nin' and all that..."

"You feel like some gross otaku from the past."

Like a timid cat, Kirino huddled in her seat and spoke bluntly what we all were thinking.

"Y-you two! When she said you could drop the formalities, she didn't mean you could just freely insult her!"

Even though I was thinking the same thing as Kirino... but actually saying it out loud just isn't right!!

Even after she took the trouble to invite you two who didn't fit in at the offline meeting... why are you saying such cruel things to her, you ingrates!

⁶ So, I'm slightly confused by this comment, but Saori in Japanese translates roughly to "finely woven cloth," so perhaps Kuroneko is making a comment here that the name Saori implies a bit more refinement.

⁷ May be a reference to Andre the Giant, a pro wrestler.

Especially Kirino! If you want to act mature, should you be saying stuff like that?! Get on your knees and apologize!

Don't say such things while sitting there sipping cola through your teeth!

However, Saori, the person who had just been spoken so badly about, was completely unphased.

"Hey, hey, Kyousuke-shi, there's no need to get that angry. I'm glad that you got so fired up for my sake, but... these types of insults feel like nothing harsher than a soft breeze to this body. Rather, they're almost pleasant. So, don't worry about it, Kyousuke-shi. I don't mind if you insult me either!"

"I really think that you're a good person... so I have no idea what you mean by that last thing there."

Geez, she's really resistant to verbal abuse, isn't she?

As I sent her a dumbfounded stare, Saori raised one finger and leaned forwards.

"Well, at least we can be open with each other. So, how about we each introduce ourselves again?"

"I'm a bit skeptical that what just happened you could call 'being open'..."

It wasn't a bad idea, though. However, at Saori's words, the place fell deathly silent.

"....."

Come on, guys, say something. Even if it might be awkward.

Seeing no other way, I took the initiative and urged them on.

"Come on, isn't this a good idea?"

"....."

As I thought, I got no response. It seems like both Kirino and Kuroneko were completely bewildered and at a loss for words.

For one, no matter how I looked at her, Kuroneko didn't seem to be the type of person to do this kind of thing... and Kirino was still dealing with the failure from before. Hmm... I mean, even if you tell them so vaguely to introduce themselves, they're still going to be shy.

As an outsider, I really shouldn't be butting in here... but it really can't be helped now. So, I proposed an idea.

"Well, how about for each person who is about to introduce themselves, we take turns asking them questions? That way, it should be easier to talk. Ah, of course, you can pass on asking a question if you want. And then, we'll gradually rotate through all of us."

"Hm. That's a nice idea, Kyousuke-shi. Then, let's start with Kuroneko-shi!"

"... Oh yeah, just feel free to pick me first..."

At Kuroneko's fierce glare, Saori, with a "well, well,"⁸ made exaggerated gestures in an attempt to calm her down.

Kuroneko blew on her hot coffee, and after slowly taking one sip, muttered with an uninterested expression.

"Alright, fine.... Well, I believe I already gave you my name, so what should I talk about after that?"

"Hmm, well first. I have a question... yeah."

I was sure that she was going to start with the obvious question about her outfit, but Saori did nothing of the sort.

"Hmm, well, could you tell us a story about an event recently that made you really nervous?"

⁸ She says "maa maa."

“... That doesn’t sound like a question appropriate for self-introductions. It sounds more like something a guest would be asked on a talk show...”

Geez, I felt the same way. I did not understand at all why this big girl would ask such a question... but with a “whatever,” Kuroneko played along. Really? She’s pretty impressively calm about this.

With that, the flow of conversation began to smoothen.

“Hm, an event that made me really nervous, right... if I had to pick one...”

Kuroneko pondered expressionlessly for a little while, but before long began to mutter in an disinterested tone.

“I was planning a submission to NicoNicoDouga⁹, so I put on cat ears and a tail and was dancing around, when my little sister saw me... Yeah, I guess that made me pretty nervous.”

I didn’t know what Niconico-whatever was, but I did understand that she had lost her cool (quite contrary to her calm demeanor now). Still, I could only really understand half of what she said, so I couldn’t comment.

“Hahaha, Kuroneko-shi is surprisingly mischievous, isn’t she? And then your sister came in?”

“Yeah. She was staring at me as if she was witnessing something inexplicable and her mouth was half open.”

I can believe it. I mean, that’s pretty much how I felt just now, right? I can relate to her sister all too well.

The conversation then turned onto Kuroneko’s little sister, but Kirino continued to be silent the entire time. As always, she’s just too nervous, isn’t she?

And then, with good timing, Saori turned the conversation to Kirino.

⁹ Video sharing site in Japan.

“Alright, it’s Kiririn-shi’s turn now! Please ask Kuroneko-shi a question~!”

“Uh, me? ... Uh.... uhhh...”

Realizing that she was suddenly being pointed at by Saori, Kirino blinked in surprise.

“I-I... don’t really have anything to ask... so... I’ll pass.”

... What an idiot. What the hell are you doing?! All this after Saori, being considerate, didn’t ask Kuroneko about her outfit so you could have an easy question! Ask it, won’t you?! Ask about her clothes!!

“.....”

But it didn’t seem like my mental wishes went through, and Kirino curled up tightly on her chair while casting her eyes downwards.

Well... this might be something else. It might be that Kirino is still traumatized from being excluded from the previous meeting... maybe...

What should I do...? Scratching my chin, I threw a suitable question at Kuroneko.

“What kinds of food do you like?”

“Fish... is that a good enough answer?”

Kuroneko begrudgingly answered me as if she was just fulfilling some sort of unwanted obligation.

... Eh... it seems that this girl also doesn’t have enough respect for her seniors, does she...? Dammit.

“Alright. Next, it is Kiririn-shi’s turn to introduce herself!”

“M-me...? Uh... uhh.... I’m Kiririn.”

Kirino had become quite stiff, and continued to look downwards as she gave her name again.

Sensing that the tension was not decreasing at all, Saori raised her voice with good timing.

“Alright, then it’s time for a question for Kiririn-shi! Kuroneko-shi, if you would please!”

“Why exactly are you wearing such an out of place outfit? I would understand if you were meeting friends in Shibuya or something, but for going to an offline meeting in Akiba, that kind of fashion is just unheard of.”

Well, she doesn’t mince words and goes right to the difficult questions, doesn’t she? This Gothic Lolita!

This will just further traumatize her, so don’t ask such a thing!

Certainly, I wanted to tell someone to ask about clothes, but that someone definitely was not you!

“Wha-”

As expected, Kirino, seeming dejected, looked offended and tried to refute Kuroneko’s statement.

“Well, I’m sorry... I can’t help it, this is just the type of clothing that suits me. And, I mean, you too...”

“Me too? What’s that? Please tell me.”

Kuroneko whispered this with a sneer. Whoa... what an amazingly condescending atmosphere.

“Ooo...”

A blood vessel rose to the surface on Kirino's forehead. Whaaa, stay in control, please, stay in control.

Kirino, normally having a quick temper, was showing an almost unheard of level of self control, and was deeply breathing in and out.

She was probably on the verge of blowing up inside, but on the surface she still didn't seem that angry.

But even the smallest thing could set her off now. Damn, I'm worried...

Hoping that she would be able to defuse this dangerous atmosphere, I looked at Saori, but...

She was sitting there with her neck cutely inclined to the side, with an expression of feigned ignorance that said "Oh dear, how will this turn out?"

It seemed like she was just going to sit back and watch... dammit, what is she trying to accomplish?

As the smell of gunpowder hung in the air, Kirino and Kuroneko's exchange continued.

"I think I'll have to take back my pass from before. I have a question for you too. That costume... what cosplay is it supposed to be? Suigintou... right?"

"Ah, this? It's not Suigintou. That's completely wrong, where exactly are you looking...? Maschera's Queen of Nightmare... could it be you haven't heard of it?¹⁰"

I had no idea. Even if she acted surprised that people hadn't heard of it, I had no idea. Kirino also didn't seem to have heard of it.

"Hm? I think I've heard the name somewhere before... it's an anime, right?"

¹⁰ Maschera is, I believe, an anime series created just for the purpose of this Light Novel.

"Yes. 'Maschera ~ Lament of a Fallen Beast.' It's an action anime, and the story and artwork are both the best out of the current season. It airs in the evening every Thursday, so watch it, alright?"

"Ah, that... isn't that competing with Meruru in the same timeslot? It's that Oshare Kei anime with those brooding superpowered anime boys, right?"¹¹

Ping. I could have sworn I saw a vision of a skull and crossbones switch being pushed.

"You said something there... 'Meruru,' could you possibly mean 'Stardust Witch Meruru'? Hah, a battle mahou shoujo anime like that is hardly in fashion anymore. Other than idiot kids, or adults who are satisfied as long as there's *moe*¹² in it, I can't think of anyone who would watch that rubbish. Also, if you take into account the ratings, it's *Meruru* that's the inferior one, isn't it? ¹³ Please don't say stupid reckless things."

"Ratings? What the hell? Huh? The programs I watch are "omotegumi," and the ones outside of that are "uragumi," that's all.¹⁴ That's just a common phrase, so don't get the wrong idea. And also, by your remarks, you haven't even seen Meruru, have you? If you watched the last battle in the first season, you definitely wouldn't be throwing around insults like that! Ahhh, how pitiable! Someone who hasn't even seen Meruru! And together with that ultra-moe insert song that will make you want to die, everything is just so silky smooth! Don't you dare make fun of kid's anime!"

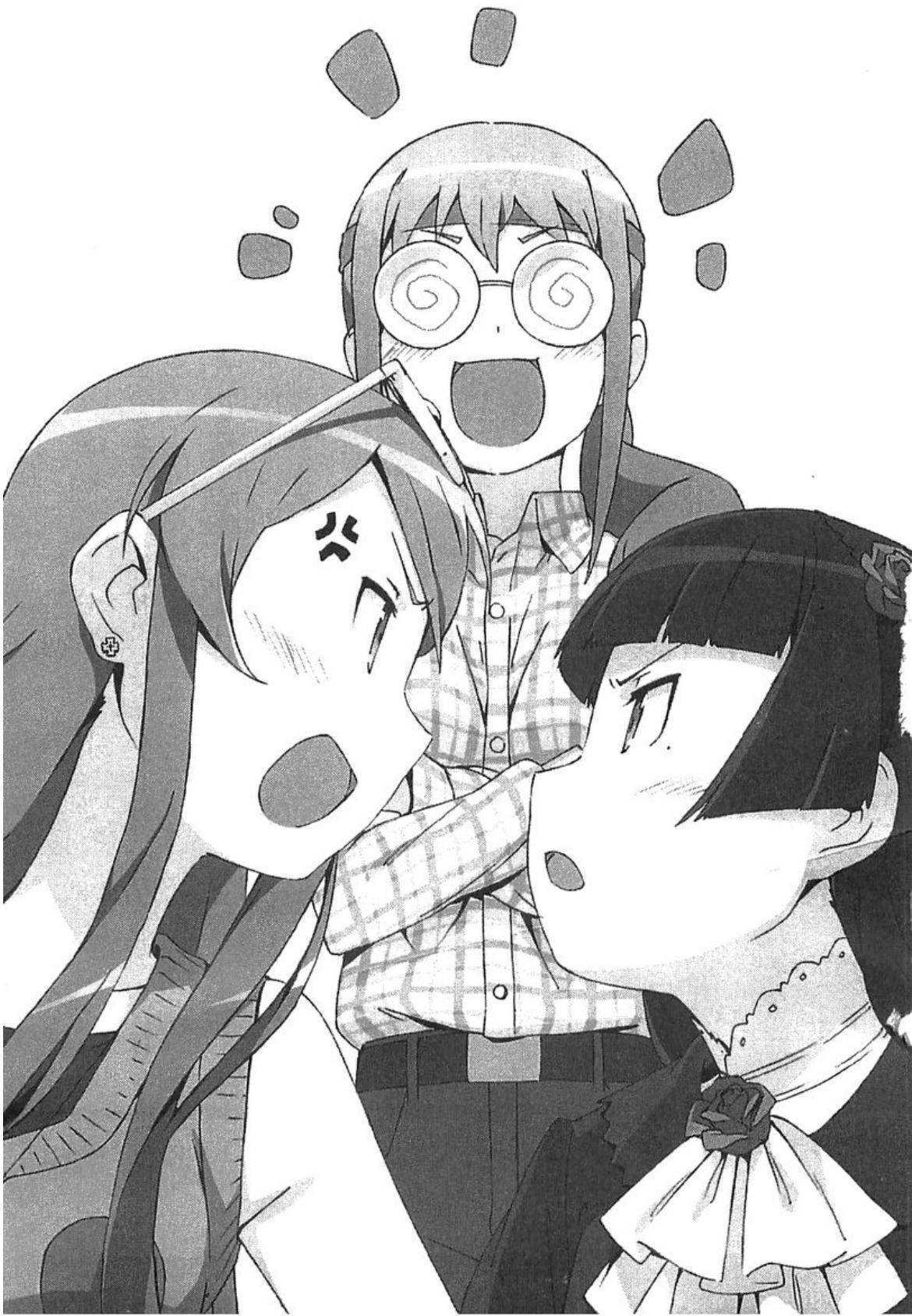
¹¹ Oh boy, lots to explain here. Oshare Kei is a subgenre of Visual Kei, generally characterized by lighter and happier colors (I dunno, look it up on Urban Dictionary or something). Kirino also says "jakigan," which describes the "third eye" some characters have (hence superpowered), but also usually is related to a personality type of a brooding teenager (think Sasuke from Naruto). When Kirino says "brooding," she uses the term "chuunibyou," which is a derogatory term for 14-some year old emo boys.

<http://bangin.wordpress.com/2008/12/21/%E4%B8%AD%E4%BA%8C%E7%97%85chuunibyo/>.

¹² ****, do I really have to explain what *moe* means in a footnote? You could say that "*moe*" roughly means "cute anime girls" in this case. For a more in depth discussion on the topic, check <http://www.animechanics.com/2011/11/defining-moe-ii-master-proposition.html>.

¹³ There's a bit of a misunderstanding here between Kirino and Kuroneko. "Urabangumi" means "program that is in the same timeslot," but "ura" can also mean "rear" or "back," and can be used as a derogatory word. Kuroneko here thinks that Kirino is insulting Maschera by using the term "urabangumi," although I don't think Kirino meant anything of the sort.

¹⁴ Refer to Note 13. "Omote" is the word for front.



“It’s you that should be more respectful. What in the world do you mean by brooding? ¹⁵ I hate that word with all of my being. Just labeling it with a word like that, idiots criticize it without even trying to see the show for what it is. Could it be that you’re one of those pigs?”

What the hell is happening? Why did an argument suddenly start?

“Waait wait wait wait! You two, don’t get up and stay in your seats! Calm down! It’s just anime, isn’t it?”

“It’s just anime?”

Kuroneko and Kirino simultaneously turned to face me.

“... H-how rude!”

Crap, otaku are scary when they get serious. I looked to Saori for help, but she just went on sipping her orange juice without concerning herself with me. I leaned over and whispered into her ear.

“... Do something, won’t you?”

“Opening up to each other like this... hehe, don’t you think they’re strangely suited for each other?”

“Where the hell do you see that?!”

Of course, without anything stopping them, the verbal argument continued.

“Hmph... well, you just have a *great* personality, don’t you? That’s why you couldn’t make any friends at the offline meeting. Were you self-conscious or something?”

“Look who’s talking. I saw you, and all you did the entire meeting was fiddle with your phone by yourself. How gloomy! If you do that, nobody’s going to talk to you, you know!”

¹⁵ “Brooding” was translated from “jakigan”.

“Shut up, you... I just suddenly wanted to check the funny pages in the morning newspaper...”

The two girls stared each other down while holding imposing poses. They were both very pretty but... this was quite a stupid argument.

But honestly, they're both to blame, aren't they? Geez... why do all the pretty ones have such problematic personalities? Because of you two, my own prejudice against good-looking girls is just getting stronger and stronger. As I thought, plain-looking girls are the best... Suddenly, I really really wanted to see my childhood friend's face again.

As I began to escape from reality, the battle of insults had come to a standstill, and Saori interrupted.

“Well, it seems that the discussion has completed the first stage, so let's proceed to the next phase, shall we? Let's see... it's my turn next.”

With her boomerangly clear voice, Saori attracted the attention of everyone in the place. The corners of her lips upturned, she smiled.

“Alright, so one more time. My name is Saori Bajeena. I act as the leader of the 'Otaku Girls Unite!' community. This is already written on my profile page, but I'm a fifteen year old currently in her third year in junior high. I believe that I am the same age as Kuroneko-shi here.”

Saori had casually changed the subject to Kuroneko, but Kuroneko showed no reaction. She was completely expressionless.

Hm. So these two were a year older than Kirino. I could guess that Kuroneko would be somewhere around that age. But Saori... she was younger than I was...?

Not really believing it, I took a good look at Saori.

“By the way, my measurements are, from the top, 88, 60,-“

“You don’t have to tell us that.”

“But but, they’re the same as Fujiwara Norika’s.”¹⁶

“Listen to what other people are saying! Stop speaking so boastfully!”

Dammit. Why am I the only one who is reacting?

One way or another, I really didn’t know how to handle this...

“Alright, alright, someone quickly ask her a question.”

Exhausted, I pleaded for someone to help me, and surprisingly, Kuroneko was the one who answered.

“... Alright then, I’ll ask the question everyone has on their mind, Saori-san. What the hell is with that gross otaku outfit and manner of speaking?”

I really wanted to hear her answer to that one too! In my heart, I applauded Kuroneko’s nerve, but what should I do when the question is answered honestly? I should take my sister and get away from this weirdo, right?

Thankfully, my fears were misplaced. Saori responded.

“Well, haha, I’m a bit embarrassed. Truth is, this was the first time I organized something like an offline meeting... so I wanted to make a good impression on everyone and did my best to make a character appropriate for a leader... I mean, normally I’m a bit more reserved than this.”¹⁷

Uh, “nano desu yo”? Seriously? You can’t just make a character out of an outfit, but you have to change how you speak too?

¹⁶ Fujiwara Norika is a Japanese model and once was Miss Japan (in 1992).

¹⁷ Saori ends this sentence with “nano desu yo,” which is a bit of a cutesy way of ending sentences. This explains Kyousuke’s next comment. For more information about the mysterious nano desu sentence ending, please [go here](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjNPeKgLnC8).

The remarks I wanted to make here were absolutely countless... for now, I'll just say that I can't even begin to believe that she's a bit more reserved normally. She might think it, but it's probably not true.

Kuroneko blinked her red eyes in surprise.

"If you did your best, how it became something like that, I can't even begin to understand. But, at least, it's a bit preferable to a certain someone who came armed to the teeth with brand-name clothes, who tried so hard but just ended up being ignored."

"What the hell? Annoying... you shouldn't be the one talking. What the hell is up with that overdone Gothic Lolita outfit?! Even in Akiba, I didn't think I would see an idiot wearing such an outrageous thing at the meeting!"

"... What did you say?"

Once again, Kirino and Kuroneko were glaring at each other. Whatever, I'm just going to leave them be. Dealing with each and every argument is just too tiring.

Also... I just realized something.

Kirino had picked some truly cute brand-name clothes for today.

Kuroneko had come in a full-blown serious cosplay.

Saori had wrapped her body in the clothes of a gross otaku.

Three people, three kinds. Yet, even though their appearances and personalities were so different, these three had common ground. And that is... that all three of these people, wanting to do well at the offline meeting, had each very carefully and with great effort picked their outfits.

"Hm..."

As I listened to Kuroneko and Kirino sling insults at each other that I couldn't quite understand, I reflected over these past few hours.

Today marked the first time I had come into contact with otaku outside of my sister... but honestly, they were completely different than what I had imagined them to be. When I say "otaku" here, I'm using the strict interpretation of "otaku." That is, people who like games or anime, who are really into what we call the "subculture."

I think I'm saying something obvious, but they are people who love their hobbies, and that's it. Yes, that's all there is to it. It's not different from liking R and B, or basketball, or mystery novels, or calligraphy.

But, up to now, I didn't think that. An "otaku" was something that went beyond just attachment to a hobby, that had some special extra quality to it. Even though I really didn't know what that extra quality was.

Even now, at my side, Kirino and Kuroneko were still bickering feverishly, probably about anime stuff. Is there really a difference between this situation and a bunch of girls in high school talking dreamily in a karaoke box about their most beloved idols? Is this really any different from members of high class society sitting in a corner of a stylish café, talking about romance novels?

Well... there probably isn't any major difference, I think. Am I wrong?

Kirino had said that because she had to worry about her public image, she couldn't pursue her hobby in public.

I understand her reasoning. Thinking back on how I thought of otaku before today, it was quite clear to me that society holds great prejudice against them. Especially amongst junior high and high school students.

... But, not all of it is completely prejudice...

Like, weren't these people a bit weird? At the very least, they weren't normal. Yes, prejudiced as I am, I dare to say this. But, I underestimated them! They were weird beyond belief!

Well, I mean... these three are the only otaku I know, and it might be hasty to use them as a basis for judgement. The typical otaku may be quite different from these three.

So, by this point, it's pretty clear that any thoughts I express on otaku from here on out will be affected greatly by the prejudices I harbor against them.

I think otaku definitely have their good points too. Although they still are a bit weird.

I looked at the unmistakable otaku, with her round glasses and huge figure.

For instance, even though this person isn't really much older or younger than Kirino, she is very considerate of others and good natured, isn't she? But also... she's weird in every possible way! Yet it was admirable that she could play the role of a leader so well in order to make sure everyone else was satisfied.

There were other good points as well.

Going over the day's events again in my head, I understood this well.

For example, take the maid café where the offline meeting happened. Take the festival-like main street in Akihabara.

And then, take this second meeting here. Apart from the sad scene of Kirino getting left out of the conversation, I didn't think there was anything bad about these things. Rather, they seemed like fun.

To have people who like the same thing gather, to hang out together, to play together...

If you can't participate in that, wouldn't you regret it too?

Are you worried about public image? Terrified of prejudice? Don't worry, come join us. Together, we'll have a huge party and have lots of fun! I could imagine them saying this with arms outstretched to the ceiling. Who's "them," you ask? Well, I don't really know...

Although, if I had to give an answer, I'd say that "them" would be everyone. Although, I might just be talking to myself.

So, these people are here to fulfill that hope, aren't they?

They came here to find friends, just like Kirino did.

I mean, just take a look at this heated verbal exchange between Kirino and Kuroneko here.

They had only met today, and they could already get so seriously into a deep argument like this... that's amazing in its own way, isn't it? Right? And that's because, between these two, there is something very important that they both strongly believe in.

Although, from the side, well, some people might still see them as quite strange.

But it still definitely wasn't a bad thing. It's not something to be looked down on, to be brushed to the side as not having any redeeming qualities. No matter how strange they happen to be.

"... Ugh... the likes of you... to just keep going on and on as you like. Alright, let's take this outside, bitch. I'll etch true fear into your body there. I'll make you regret this in the next life."

"Shut up! Do whatever the hell you want, you brooding¹⁸ nonsensical woman."

".... B-b-brooding.... N-n-n-n-nonsensical...? O...oooo... you've finally said something you shouldn't have... Ahh, how pathetic, you don't know what you've done, do you... even if you regret it, it's too late. Even I won't be able to stop it..."

"Are you an idiot?! You, don't you want to stop being such an embarrassment? Wouldn't it be better if you went off and died somewhere?"

... Can I take back what I said before?

¹⁸ "Brooding" was translated from "jakigan".

Otaku... are definitely not all good people.

Chapter 3:

Part 5

It was a little while after that. Having left the McDonalds, we followed Saori's plan and went for some light shopping in Akihabara. This affair (if you'll let me call it an affair) actually dragged on for longer than expected, and because I really don't want to recall all of it I'll omit it. But, seriously! You don't know, do you?! You can't guess what it's like touring around Akihabara like this, can you?! Just try to imagine it!

... Have you tried? You tried, right? OK, take what you imagined, and add 150% of pain on top of that, and you'll probably be close to what it really was like.

Geez... I'm pretty surprised that I didn't run away at some point. I'm an impressive guy, aren't I?

Also, during that time, Kuroneko and Kirino never ceased their foul-mouthed arguments. It was generally tangled in otaku subjects though. They started from anime, then went to games, then to manga... this couple and that couple... the artwork is yadda yadda, the DVD's price is blah blah... but through it all, I was amazed at their everlasting string of verbal abuse and bitter insults.

It was evening, and the get-together had just disbanded. Even though they had already said their formal farewells earlier, the battle between jakigan and mahou shoujo¹ continued.

"Hehehe, Kiririn-shi and Kuroneko-shi are really hitting it off, aren't they."

"Where exactly do you see that? Do you need thicker glasses or something?"

Those words came out of my mouth, but... I sort of understand where she's coming from.

Watching as Kirino and Kuroneko threw verbal abuse at each other, I couldn't help but turn up the edges of my lips a bit.

¹ OK I basically gave up trying to translate jakigan every time it comes up. See note 18 on 3-4. Mahou shoujo is magical girl, the genre of anime that Kirino likes.

I'm glad, Kirino. I'm glad that you found someone to talk to about your hobbies in such a loud, unrestrained way. Although, you'll definitely deny that this has happened...

But you've made a friend here, haven't you?

"... Well, then."

Trying not to get pulled into the otaku anime dispute, Saori and I stood a bit to the side.

We stood on a walkway at the side of Akihabara's Washington Hotel. Soon, there was a crosswalk in front of us.

As Kirino's older brother, there were words that I definitely had to say to this person.

With as much sincerity as I could muster, I lowered my head to Saori.

"Thank you."

"... Huh? What exactly are you thanking me for?"

A question mark floated above Saori's head and she inclined her neck while her mouth became like this :3.

Although, I'm pretty sure she understood. But, saying anything past what we've said would be inappropriate.

But I said what I had to say. And I definitely believed that my feelings were transmitted successfully. I smiled.

"As I thought, you're a good person. Kirino and I were lucky, I think."

"... I don't know what you're saying, but... hehe, I'm not as good as you make me out to be. I've always just only done what I want to do, and not anything more..."

but if you really think like that, then probably, that's because Kyousuke-shi himself is a good person. Other people are just 'mirrors' of that, aren't they?"

Having said that, Saori took out a poster from her backpack and wielded it like a light saber.

The poster gleamed under the light of the setting sun. Squinting at the shining point of her makeshift sword, I shrugged my shoulders.

"Hm, say whatever you want."

"Exactly."

Saori smiled and turned her back to me. Surely, without any makeup on, her face would be incredibly expressive. Her charming smile was enough to give me that impression.

In her swirly eyeglasses with her head wrapped in a bandana. With her checkered shirt tucked into her trousers.

It was a terrible, gross otaku fashion. I couldn't believe how out of fashion it was!

Saori, with a swish, swung her sword to the side, and resheathed it into her backpack.

"Well then, let's be sure to meet again sometimes. Nin."

The traffic light turned green. Akihabara station was tinted with the glow of dusk.

Confidently strolling away from me, not afraid of what others might think, she was an impressive sight.

Not wanting to be outdone, I puffed up my chest and walked to Kirino's side.



Chapter 4:

Part 1

One night had passed since the offline meeting, and it was now after school on the day after.

As usual, I was walking home, side by side with Manami.

“Hey, lately I’ve been sleeping with this bear-shaped body pillow. It’s reaaaally comfortable.”

“Mhm.”

I continued to give half-hearted replies and generally ignoring the casual, old woman-ish talk of my bespectacled childhood friend, and suddenly I heard a worried voice.

“... Hey, Kyou-chan? Are you taking a break from studying today?”

“Nah, I was planning on going to the library with you as usual, but... why are you asking?”

Did she realize that I wasn’t really listening? But, that’s how I’ve always acted...

And also, if she really was angry, then it would be pretty obvious and she would have blurted it out already.

So... was it because it was bothersome to help me study three or four times a week, even though there wasn’t a test anytime soon...? No, I don’t think that’s right either...

As I thought about these things suspiciously, Manami listlessly looked at the ground.

“Because, Kyou-chan... you’ve really just seemed tired ever since morning...”

“Ah, is it that?”

That's probably true. I mean, yesterday, my life was quite unexpectedly difficult, after all.

I'm really mentally drained from that. Even after the meeting had disbanded, I was harshly abused by Kirino on the train ride back.

That idiot was going on like "That was the worst! Today was such a terrible failure! Tch... and who exactly was it who came up with the idea to go to the offline meeting?" and so on... Although, it's true that she was first excluded by the others at the offline meeting, and then got stuck in an endless argument with Kuroneko...

But in the end, wasn't it fun? What an insincere person, this girl.

You might be tempted to think that she was being pretty cute. But keep in mind that for an hour and a half, from the seat next to me, all I was getting is rapid-fire abuse. The only thing left in my mind was hatred.

Sigh...

For the umpteenth time today, I gave a heavy sigh. Lifting my shoulders, dejected, I spoke.

"Well... lots of things have happened. And you're right, I'm not really in the mood for studying today. I'm really tired."

"Ah, I see... that's too bad... But if that's the case, I guess it can't be helped..."

Manami assumed the same posture as me, looking dejected. Manami had always done this; when I'm in a good mood, she would laugh with me, but when I'm down, she would feel down right alongside me.

Every single time, Manami goes through so much trouble for me. She's so good natured and has such a large amount of sympathy.

I mean, it's not like I'm not grateful to her. But it would be strange to tell her that now.

“Let’s go all out and have fun today.”

“Huh...?”

Looking quite shocked, Manami turned to face me. In the middle of her eyeglasses, I could see her eyes blinking in surprise.

“I said, let’s go and have fun today. You don’t want to?”

“N-no. I-I’m not against it.”

Manami shook her head. Hey, calm down, you seriously look like a puppy who is greeting its master or something.

“I see. Well, do you have somewhere you want to go? If you want, we can go as far as the next town over... should we go see a movie or something?”

“U-uh...”

Fidgeting with and readjusting her glasses, Manami was deep in thought. Yes, please think about it carefully.

Although I was trying to recall how much I had in my wallet, for this outing I was willing to spend it all. Also, it wasn’t a bad idea to treat my always so helpful childhood friend to a fun day out once in a while.

I don’t want you to misunderstand, though, so I’ll say that to the very end this trip is still for my sake.

If I can chitchat loosely like this for a while, all my exhaustion will be more or less lifted, I think.

“A-anywhere is fine?”

“Yeah. Anywhere.”

“Okay then, I won’t hold back in that case.”

With a loose smile, Manami proposed the following.

“I want to go to the park in the center of town.”¹

“... You didn’t even hesitate for a second, and picked the absolutely plainest option, didn’t you? Did you really need to ask ‘Anywhere is fine?’ before giving that answer?”

I had really wanted to treat her to something, so I said something rather selfish...

“H-huh? Why are you getting angry...? Didn’t you say that we could go anywhere?”

Manami continued on with a sour expression. Yeah, I guess I did say that, but... geez, she couldn’t be any more different from those three otaku from yesterday, could she? If I had made the same offer to those three yesterday, they would have definitely emptied my pockets.

“Well, fine. But at least let me treat you to a drink or something.”

“Ah, thanks... then, I’d like some tea. Hot tea please.”

“Yeah yeah, the usual, right? Wow... spring is already over, but they’re still selling that...?”

Seriously... she doesn’t spend a lot of money, does she?

How could she possibly smile so happily at something that just costs 220 yen?² (2)

¹ She says “chuou park,” which could mean “park in the center” or could be the actual name of a park. I’m taking the former interpretation.

² Around 2.50 USD.

Chapter 4:

Part 2

So, after walking for a little over fifteen minutes, we came to the central park in the town next to ours.

It was a rather well-known park, at least according to the tourist's map, and it was definitely very spacious.

It felt like a restful place, with its water fountains, benches, ponds, bridges, and rose gardens.

There was also the attraction of a charming museum in a Western-style house.

The grounds were surrounded by a tree-lined walking path, often used by families and the elderly.

During spring, the sakura blossoms would go into full bloom, and this area became a must-visit flower viewing spot.

It was a bit chilly today, so even drinking something out of season like hot green tea wasn't that bad of an idea.

"Here you go, as always."

"Thanks. Itadakimasu."¹

Rustle. I took out a bottle of hot green tea I had bought from the convenience store, and handed it over after opening the cap. Sitting on a bench, Manami took the piping hot tea and wrapped it in a handkerchief, holding it carefully. Draining half my tea, looking to my side, I noticed that Manami had not budged.

"Something wrong? It's not hot enough to burn you."

"Huh? Ehehee... it's nothing."

¹ Traditional Japanese polite thing to say at the beginning of meals. Translates roughly to "I receive." I chose not to translate this since I feel it is common enough.

Manami hugged the tea to her chest, and for some reason began to smile.

I don't understand at all. Drinking another sip of my tea, I exhaled with a *haaah*.

The tea hit the spot. I could feel myself being warmed to the core.

"Mmm... I mean... it's nice, isn't it...? Being like this... it'd be nice if things could stay like this forever."

"... However you look at it, you're thinking a bit too hard, aren't you? You must have been a bonsai in your past life."

"That would still be fine, if I could still help Kyou-chan."

After that, for a little while, we basked in the sun while making small talk.

Just by being by my side, Manami always made me feel like I was relaxing on the porch of a quiet rural house.

"Ahh... I'm getting sleepy..."

It did seem nice to take a midday nap here. Although, it would be nice if I had a pillow... and just as I thought that, I felt a poke on my shoulder.

"K-Kyou-chan?"

"... Hm? What?"

As I turned my sleepy eyes to Manami, for some reason she had spread her arms out wide.

With a nervous expression and flushed cheeks, Manami whispered.

"G-go ahead."

I had no idea what she wanted me to do, so I inclined my neck suspiciously.

And then, I caught sight of a certain something over Manami's shoulder.

Huh? Could that be... without thinking, I slid towards Manami and stared.

"... Kyou-chan."

"Ah, sorry. So, what was it?"

When my gaze returned to Manami, I found her staring at me intently with upturned eyes.

W-what is this silent pressure coming from Manami...?

She seemed a bit angry, and her face all the way to her ears was red... and also...

"... Are your glasses fogging over?"

"Ugh... Kyou-chan, you idiot..."

She quickly turned the other way. I blinked in surprise.

"... Why are you angry? That's unusual for you."

"Hmph. Kyou-chan is just thickheaded, is all."

As she huffed in anger, she briskly wiped her glasses.

She put her glasses back on, and asked another questions.

"... But also, what exactly were you looking at?"

"Ah, look, this here."

Manami turned in the direction I was pointing. There was a small plaza there, in which kids often played soccer or grass-lot baseball. At the moment, there were two wagons stopped there.

So...

“Over there... what exactly are they doing there? A shoot for a TV drama or something?”

“Probably. But I don’t think it’s a TV drama. See, that’s not a video camera, right? That was a flash, wasn’t it... ah, they’re taking photos.

In the spirit of curiosity, we approached the wagons.

From the walkway, we looked at the grassy plaza. Several employees were working, adjusting what looked to be lighting equipment, talking with girls who were probably the models.

“A fashion magazine photo shoot... yeah?”

“Do you read those a lot?”

“Ahaha... not often. When I’m buying clothes², I usually just ask the store employees for advice.”

As I thought. Well, in any case, I also agreed that it probably was a fashion magazine photo shoot.

It seemed they were taking photos with an evening background. The stylish girls were striking various poses, as they were bathed in the flashes from the cameras. It wasn’t as simple as smiling for the camera and doing a simple pose. An atmosphere of strictness floated about the place.

I might be stating the obvious, but models don’t have easy jobs at all.

There were only two who were having their photos taken, but there were also a number of girls who were obviously models waiting on standby to the side.

“Whoa... look look Kyou-chan. That girl is really cute~”

² She actually says “Western clothes,” but “Western clothes” is basically everything that is not traditional Japanese wear (kimonos, yukata, etc.).

“Ah, you’re right. She’s cute.”

“Hm? That was a pretty unenergetic response.”

Well, I mean... it’s not like we’re going out with each or something. But just in case, when I am with another girl, I won’t say something like “Whoa, that girl is really cute!”

Wouldn’t that annoy even you, Manami...? Or maybe not. You’re not that aware of your own self as a young girl, are you? Heh... my feelings about this are pretty complicated.

“Hey, that brown-haired girl looks reaaaaally cool. Cute!”

She’s really getting worked up about this... it’s not like they’re big celebrities or anything.

She’s really a fangirl at heart, isn’t she?

I considered briefly responding with “You’re cuter.”

What kind of face would she make if I did that? A devious smile appeared on my face. And then, naturally, my gaze was attracted to the girl that Manami had been praising.

Hm. Certainly, that girl was really good looking.

She had long legs, was slender and tall, but that face...

“Isn’t that Kirino?!”

“Eehhh?!”

Manami and I were taken aback with surprise. Manami, who knew nothing about Kirino’s side job, was especially shocked. Blinking rapidly, she turned to Kirino, she looked back and forth from Kirino to me, as if comparing us.

“U-umm... Kirino... chan... that’s your sister, right? Kyou-chan’s...”

“... Ah, well, yeah... probably.”

“U-uhh... what do you mean probably?”

I mean, I was surprised too...

She had told me before... that she was working as a model or something...

I didn’t have any reason to think she was lying, but I guess it never really hit home. That is, until now, with her right in front of me.

... So she was telling the truth.

I took another long hard look at the brown haired model.

She was sitting in the chair, and seemed to be in a meeting with one of the staff members.

“... Heh.”

She’s mixing with the adults so easily, and is so focused on doing her job.

Somehow or other, I had to revise my opinion of her now.

I’ve been underestimating her. Making light of her.

When she told me she was a “model,” I thought it was something like some junior high school kids playing around. I had an image in my mind of them being flattered by the photographer, getting excited, and having their pictures taken.

But...

The Kirino in front of me now was engrossed in deep conversation while staring at the model getting her picture taken with the most serious expression I’ve ever

seen. At the same time, someone was quickly straightening out the imperfections in her outfit, and fussing about her hair...

Although, the atmosphere around the model who was being bathed in camera flashes was much more lively.

Kirino was probably waiting for her turn, so the air around her was more tense.

“... Heh.... It’s pretty amazing, isn’t it?”

“... Yeah, pretty amazing.”

I had thought that the photo shoots would take place in a more showy location where they would be playing around carelessly.

It wasn’t like that at all. Although, with such a cursory glance, I really couldn’t say anything with confidence. But certainly, they were earning not a small amount of money for getting their pictures taken. So it couldn’t have been as easy-going as I had imagined.

“... It’s really amazing... it’s as if they live in a completely different world...”

“Yeah.”

Even if you didn’t say that to me, I understood all too well. She was an extraordinary person, living in a world completely separate from us normal people. Although, I had momentarily forgotten about this since we had just gone out together the other day.

Dammit, for some reason, I’m a bit pissed off.

“At any rate, she doesn’t resemble me at all. From as far as I can remember, she’s always had those good looks.”

“You really shouldn’t be that modest, you know. Haven’t you heard she’s also really smart?”

“Huh? What the hell are you saying?”

Damn. That came out a bit harsher than I wanted it to. I immediately regretted it... but Manami smiled and seemed to take it in stride. It was as if she was trying to tell me “don’t worry about it.”

“My brother is in the same grade as your sister. They go to different schools though. And they recently had some kind of standardized test. And, he said that she was on the list for the top scores in the prefecture.”

“Who?”

“I said already. Kyou-chan’s sister. Kirino-chan.”

For a moment, I really hadn’t processed what Manami had said. I took a few seconds to digest her words in my head.

“S-seriously?! Huh?! Not only schoolwide... but prefecture-wide? You said, prefecture, didn’t you, just now?”

“Yeah. In the prefecture, she was something like the fourth or fifth best score. My memory of the exact ranking is a bit fuzzy though... but it was something like that.”

Her grades were that good?! I had absolutely no idea... although, until now I hadn’t really ever been interested in my sister, so we haven’t ever had the chance to talk about things...

It’s pretty natural that I wouldn’t know about this... but even then I was still surprised.

Hanging out with her kogal³ classmates. Working seriously as a model.

Being able to talk excitedly for hours on end about children’s anime. Intensely playing eroge.

³ Kogal is a female fashion style in Japan, often reminiscent of Japanese school uniforms.

And what's more, she studies hard too?

Hah... honestly, I'm a bit frightened.

My little sister may just be much more outrageous⁴ (4) than I had thought at first.

More outrageous in a lot of different ways.

⁴ The adjective he uses is “tondemonai,” which means something like “outrageous” or “unthinkable.”

Chapter 4:

Part 3

A few days passed. Coming home from the school, I went into the living room and saw my mother, who seemed to have just come back from shopping. While putting things into the refrigerator, she hummed happily to herself and seemed to be in a good mood.

Did something good happen? Holding a wheat tea in one hand, I asked her.

“Mom, why are you so happy? Do you need to go see a doctor or something?”

“Oh, Kyousuke! It’s not like I’m drunk or anything, so don’t worry. Ehehe, it’s just that, just now, the lady next door gave me a compliment. ‘That child of yours is really impressive,’ she said.”

“Oh? My, I’m blushing. So... in this idle chatter, what exploits of mine was she praising?”

“Of course it wasn’t about you.”

Hmph! Well I knew that! But adding that “of course” to the beginning just really made me lose faith in her! Keh, she’s just really looking for trouble down the line.

“A-ahh... so it was Kirino...”

I murmured while my face twitched in irritation, and my mother’s face burst into a huge smile as if she were saying “I’m glad you asked!” I didn’t really ask anything, though.

Yeah, yeah, well excuse me for being your good-for-nothing son. Please, go on about your pride and joy daughter.

“Yesterday during club activities, somehow or other she did amazingly well, and it seems she’ll be participating in a big tournament later. The lady next door heard from her daughter.”

“Oh? And what type of club is she in?”

“What? You don’t know, even though you’re her brother? She does track, you know, track... geez, you two seriously don’t have a good relationship, do you...”

“Shut up.”

Hey hey, give me a break... she has good looks. She excels at schoolwork. And now she’s also a sports prodigy?

Dammit, enough already. This stuff does exist in manga though, where there are characters that are just good at everything.

But because this was reality I was really bothered by this all...

Well, I guess they did exist. This type of freak-like being.

“But, she has time to do club activities? Studying and playing with friends... doesn’t she have to do a lot of other things?”

“Well, of course, she has to keep up with schoolwork and other things too. Otherwise, her father really wouldn’t approve, right? You might not know, but she’s also working as a magazine model.”

“Hm.”

Well, yeah, sure.

It probably wasn’t very easy to get that stubborn person to let her go off and do something flashy like being a model.

Although, now that I think about it, she also dyes her hair and wears makeup even though she’s still a kid.

“She made a promise with her father. Let her do whatever she wants, and she’d be sure to keep up with everything else.”

“Ahh...”

I responded in a vague way.

My mother grinned broadly.

“And now... she’s really pretty famous in the neighborhood. She’s also so polite when she goes outside, and greets everyone properly... and also like me she has such cute looks, doesn’t she?

“Huh?”

I raised my eyebrows in complete disbelief, but my mother continued on without paying me any heed.

Well, certainly, they both know how to completely ignore other people when they’re talking.

“She’s also really popular with the elderly! She really makes me proud too! All the others are so envious of her.”

“But isn’t all that politeness just part of the agreement with father? Her motives aren’t exactly pure, you know.”

“Not pure? That doesn’t really matter. Even if she didn’t talk it would be the same, wouldn’t it? Kirino would still be great – that wouldn’t change.”

She’s being so blunt about it. Will she really be alright, my mother? But well, she did have her reasons.

Kirino put a lot of time and effort into doing this in order to keep her freedom, and she managed to come out with great results.

That at least I had to recognize. It’s not like wanting to do something is the same as being able to properly do it.

At the very least, it would have been impossible for me.

“Hmm...”

Although lately, whenever people talk about Kirino it’s always been “She’s so great!” this and “She’s great!” that. Do people not know any other words?¹ Although it’s possible I’m just speaking from prejudice.

Well, whatever. I’ve never really had an interest in my little sister, so there are a lot of things about her I don’t know. That is... at least for the most part.

Honestly, as an ordinary older sibling, it’s not that amusing to hear my sister’s praises at every turn. It makes me feel like my own shortcomings are being emphasized. This is sort of a shameful way of thinking about it, though.

As these complicated thoughts flew through my head, my mother said something unexpected.

“Now that I think about it, lately that girl’s been more lively than usual. Although, it’s probably a change that only I’ve noticed.”

“Oh?”

As I raised my eyebrow, my mother said something crazy.

“It’s... definitely a boy, isn’t it?! Kyousuke, do you know anything about it?”

“A b-boy?”

“Yes, there’s no mistaking it. She met a boy - that’s why she’s smiling so much now!”

That’s not it. Do you really think there would be a boy that would go out with *that*? If there was, I’d give in and concede that she is a god.

But my mother clearly didn’t agree, so she excitedly investigated².

¹ “Great” is translated from “sugoi.”

² I translated “excitedly” from “breathing erratically from her nose.”

“So, you don’t know? Even a vague idea would be fine.”

“Why would I know? I have a bad relationship with her, remember?”

I answered as if it was obvious, and my mother stared at me with pursed lips.³

“Seriously, you’re useless, aren’t you? You really should try harder. Your sister is doing so well, so it’s obviously not a problem with the genes.”

“Keh. Unfortunately, I guess those genes came from your side... for an ordinary person like me, I’ll just have to go the straightforward way and keep studying.”

At my sharp parting shot, I left the room. Putting my hand on the doorknob, I opened the door with a *clang*!

... Kirino has been more lively than usual, huh...?

Well, I do have a guess as to the reason. Maybe... although it seems unbelievable.

Being shown her surprising hobby, being abused by her at every step, being made to play an eroge, being taken along to the offline meeting, being dragged around Akiba... the life advice that I was forced to give seems to have had a bit of an effect.

Haha, but I really might be reading too much into this⁴. What am I saying? That would be ridiculous.

³ It literally says that her lips are in the shape of the hiragana for “he,” or へ.

⁴ The phrase he uses is “gara de mo nai,” which translates roughly to “there isn’t a pattern.”

Chapter 4:

Part 4

A few days later, in the evening, I finally finished “Loving my Little Sister.”

Honestly, it was a troublesome, difficult ordeal to get through.

I mean, it wasn’t as if it was boring.

It was just that this game had already driven me insane a countless number of times.

Already having a real little sister, I had to endure playing a little sister capture game like this, and somehow or other survived up to this point. I did something pretty impressive, if I say so myself. No... seriously, I’m really, really happy...

I’m seriously filled with emotion. Setting aside my impressions of the actual game, I feel an extraordinary sense of accomplishment.

“O....oogh....”

Why am I getting so excited over this...?

A warm feeling broke forth from inside my chest...

Yes! I did it! Happy happy! Banzai! I want to shout my triumph out to the world!

Haha! I won’t ever have to grovel to those little devils ever again!

I won’t have to listen to their whispers of “Oniichan, is it okay?” and cry tears of blood ever again!

“Yaaaaaaaaahoooooooooooooo!!!!”

I was showing an idiotic and rare amount of high energy. But even I couldn’t stop this excitement!

And then, suddenly...

On the computer I had borrowed from Kirino, the END credits began to roll.

“Ahh...”

Sitting at the desk I usually worked at, I stretched my back muscles with all my might and let out a breath.

“Phew...”

After that, the feeling of accomplishment slowly dwindled into nothingness... my chest tightened. The high spirits of just a few moments before came quickly crashing down.

It was my first time feeling the strange emptiness that lingered right after finishing a galge.

Nothing good can come of this. What was up with this feeling, as if a wise man had just achieved enlightenment?

Hm... and why was I so worked up a few moments before...?

“Well, let’s go return the game then.”

With a clear and serene determination, I stood up. I left my own room, and knocked on the door to my sister’s room.

Kshh. The door opened slightly, and my sister poked her head out.

As usual, she glared at me as if she was looking at garbage.

“What? Do you want something?”

“... Uhh... I’m here to... return the game...”

Geez, this girl... in the end, reality and games are different, aren't they? Here, I definitely couldn't go through event sequences and generate good will that way. There seriously had to be bugs in the difficulty level of this game.¹

Kirino took the computer from me, and spoke with a doubtful tone.

"You finished it?"

"I finished it."

"Hmph... and?"

"Well..."

Hey, sister... what's with that evil professor expression?

If I responded incorrectly, I felt as if I would be shot. Feeling very nervous, I answered cautiously.

"Well.... umm... it was really interesting?"

"Hmph, in what ways? Be more specific."

Kirino began her emotionless cross-examination.

Ah... I see... right now, I was stuck in one of those "decision points" like in the game...

But, the affection points the little sister in front of me had for me were already completely in the negative.

So, if I made a poor choice, my life would end... and in this game of real life, there were no saves and reloads... my fate would be decided by a single decision. Dead or alive.

¹ In case it wasn't clear in the translation, Kyousuke is facetiously referring to his relationship with Kirino as a video game.

Well, wasn't this great. I laughed fearlessly (at least, inside my heart).

"Ummmm... Shiori's scenario? The latter half was... a good story, I think. That is, when their parents didn't like their relationship... and Shiori ran away from home... and then the main character chased after her... and the background changed to that setting sun... that scene."

"....."

Upon hearing my response, Kirino shut her eyes and was silent.

Perhaps I had managed to give a correct response... or not. Anxious, I felt my heart beat quickly.

... But honestly, I had just picked the scene I had played most recently.

Clicking furiously like that through such emotionally burdensome scenes, do you honestly think I could remember all of them, idiot?! Someone please save my life here!

At long last, Kirino opened her eyes. With narrowed eyes as if she was looking down at me, she spoke.

"... W-well... I guess you sort of understand then."

Ooh... somehow, it seemed like I had given a correct response. Heh... having miraculously extended my life, my heartbeat quieted down. And then I thought about this once again.

This is soooooooooooooo ridiculous!! This seriously isn't funny! Why do I have to talk with my *real* little sister about little sister *games*?! I mean, I had already tried very hard to help her make friends so I wouldn't have to talk about this stuff in the first place! First, tell me what happened with those people, can't you?!

"But, you still have room for improvement. That isn't the only good scene in the game. For example..."

“W-wait.”

Interrupting Kirino when she started trying to speak, I tried to change the subject.

“We can talk about that stuff at length later... but first tell me. What’s been happening with those people we met at the offline meeting?”

“Huh? Ah... those people.”

Kirino pursed her lips, and with a blunt tone, beckoned me into her room.

“Come in.”

It seemed that she didn’t think it would be appropriate to continue this conversation in the hallway.

“...Okay.”

I obediently followed her orders and entered. Kirino put the computer on the table and sat on the bed.

Kirino cracked the joints on her neck, and spoke in an extremely uninterested tone.

“In short, we’ve been keeping in touch, even now. Through mail and through messages.”

“Oh? Then you’ve become friends.”

“Friends, I wouldn’t say... more like conversation partners? Really, we just talk with each other. They tell me things that I wouldn’t know, for example... well, it’s pretty useful at least.”

Wait, that sounds exactly like friendship, doesn’t it? She’s just dead set on not using that word, it seems.

When you're hiding your true personality, you don't have trouble with calling people friends, so why can't you be straight with the people you can be completely open and honest with? Well, it's not like this is unexpected...

"So, you haven't met with them in person again?"

"Yeah. That black one seems to live relatively close by, but that huge one is a bit far from me. So they're thinking of organizing another offline meeting... well, I guess it can't be helped, right? I'll go for their sake... yeah."

"Huh... I see..."

It seems like I did a pretty good job.

Not only did I clear the game, but it seems that I succeeded in getting Kirino to make friends she could talk openly with.

My mother had said that Kirino has been looking pretty happy lately... and it also seemed that she had become more self-sufficient and stopped relying on me. It seems that she intended to go to the next offline meeting by herself.

So, everything seemed to be going pretty well, and there was no more need for our "life advice" sessions.

Geez...

So, I guess that my work is done. Feeling refreshed, I spoke.

"Hey, Kirino. Don't go carelessly dropping your DVDs again, alright?"

"Shut up, idiot. Do you really think I would repeat something stupid like that?"

... Look who's talking. That time, just by shaking you a bit you were so flustered that you were so easily caught in my obvious trap, and tried to cover up your carelessness with your short temper.

As I reminisced with a grin on my face, Kirino blushed and threw a tissue box at me.

“Ah.”

Moving my neck, I nimbly dodged it. Then I proceeded to escape from the room.

Shutting the door behind me, I heard a *bang!* as something else collided into the door.

She'll always be like this, won't she...? She's pretty frightening, isn't she?

Well, whatever. Kousaka Kyousuke's life advice shop at this time was officially closed.

And I would never do it again.

Chapter 4:

Part 5

It was a Sunday evening, and when I returned home from the library, the house was strangely silent.

There were no sounds of cooking coming from the kitchen, nor could I hear the television or the sound of any talking.

It was unnatural. Taking off my shoes, I felt a tingling sensation and slapped the back of my neck.

A strangely tense atmosphere floated about. I could feel goosebumps rising on my skin.

Something was definitely strange. This was different than the home I was used to.

“.....?”

Raising my eyebrows, I walked through the hallway while trying to keep absolutely silent. I stopped in front of the door to the living room. An ominous feeling washed over me as I placed my hand on the knob, and I hesitated for a moment.

Gulp. Swallowing deeply, I opened the door.

“... I’m... home...?”

When I entered the room, I saw Kirino and my father sitting across a table from each other on the sofa having a meeting.

Both were silent. My father was always the silent type, and Kirino usually didn’t talk to other members of the family.

So, at first glance, the scene didn’t seem anything out of the ordinary.

But, the fact that neither of them seemed to notice me coming into the room was very odd.

That wasn't the only thing. Nobody was watching the TV, or reading the newspaper or a magazine; they were both just sitting silently, opposite from each other.

My father's face was absolutely expressionless, so I couldn't tell what he was thinking, but Kirino was frozen solid, and was hanging her head.

And then...

"Ah."

Everything became clear when I glanced at the table.

On top of the table, as my father might put it from his line of work, there were two pieces of evidence.

First, there was the brand-name handbag that Kirino often carried with her.

Second, there was something that I had definitely not forgotten.

It was the "Stardust Witch Meruru" DVD case, with the copy of "Loving my Little Sister (18+)" inside.

The DVD case was open. The evidence was more than enough. There was no use in arguing about who was guilty.

"..... Hm."

While blinking a number of times, I came to understand the situation. Let me give you my impression.

IS SHE A HUUUUUUUUUUUUUGE IDIOOOOOOOT?!?!

Idiot! What a huge idiot! This situation was already so pitiable, I felt tears coming to my eyes!

Didn't I say that the one thing we had to do was to not expose her secret to our father?!

And she was careless again and dropped her DVD... didn't I already warn her not to do that?!

She had repeated her blockheaded mistake once again!

Gah!! She's done the same thing as when she exposed her secret to me...! Why, if she's so talented everywhere else¹, does she *have* to fail at this one thing?! How can she be so careless...

Ahh... what should I do? I have no idea... I don't...

It took all my strength just to keep from trembling.

"Kyousuke, just a minute, Kyousuke..."

As I was standing in the open doorway, frozen, I heard my mother softly calling to me.

When I turned around, I saw my mother tugging on my shirt sleeve.

"Please go up to your room."

"Ah-ahhh..."

My mother pulled me into the hallway, and softly closed the living room door behind her.

"... Uhh... did... something happen?"

The question came out quite strained.

¹ Kyousuke refers to her as "high spec."

“Well, that is...”

The answer my mother gave me was roughly what I had already guessed.

Kirino had accidentally dropped the DVD case in front of my father, and he managed to see what was inside.

I wanted more details for what had happened, but it seemed like my mother also wasn't there the minute it happened, so she didn't seem to know much more herself. The most likely case would be that, as it happened with me, she bumped into father here in the entryway, but it wasn't likely that the case would have opened by itself when it hit the ground.

Rather, it could have been that my father saw the anime DVD, and opened it up.

I can't begin to imagine what my father's face looked like when he saw the 18+ label...

And as expected, my father was quite shaken by it. I was also shaken by it, and exhaled deeply.

“... Haaahhhh....”

In the first place, why exactly was she walking around with that thing in her bag...?

A number of questions welled up, but in either case, this was just a miraculous state of affairs.

This really wasn't a problem you could explain away as a mere blunder or an unlucky coincidence. This was fate, wasn't it? Yes, I seriously may believe even that.

“Kyousuke... you don't seem very surprised about this.”

“Well, yeah. After all, I don't know much about her.”

Those were my true feelings. I wasn't lying. But my mother didn't give up her line of questioning.

"Could it be... that you already knew about this?"

"Huh? Knew about what?"

"... I mean... that... that is... that Kirino had... that kind of thing."

My mother strained to get her words out as she glanced at me out of the side of her eyes, and I began to think.

How should I respond to that? If I wanted to protect myself, then it was clear that I should play dumb.

Not being able to decide, I fell into silence.

... Geez. Even for me, that was a bit half-baked. A self-derisive smile appeared on my face.

I really didn't have any interest in that girl. Even now, those feelings have not changed.

To the very end, I always desired a normal human life.

The same mundane characters, with the same laid-back, never-changing everyday scenery.

All this drama and all these unique characters were definitely not things I needed.

Kirino was in that second, more conspicuous group. So, seriously, I didn't care. I believed that from the bottom of my heart.

However... she had taken my life advice, and I had put effort into helping her, so strangely enough I was her partner in crime. And, I also caught a glimpse of her important hobby, in Akihabara...

Tch. I can pretend to be uninterested all I want, but I was already in too deep.

“... Well yeah. I knew.”

“... I knew it... could it be... she was influenced by you, wasn’t she?”

I knew she would say that. Just look at this lack of confidence. Doesn’t it make you want to cry?

“No, definitely not. Think before you speak, mom. In the first place, I don’t even have a computer, and you know there’s really no place in my room for me to hide anything.”

“If you put it like that, I guess... well, whatever. In any case that was definitely Kirino’s possession.”

Crestfallen, my mother let out a long sigh.

It was a reaction at finding out such a stellar daughter would be carrying *that* sort of thing.

For example, if my father had discovered that I was playing eroge, my mother would probably just laugh her head off.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve seen your father so angry. At this rate, this isn’t going to blow over any time soon. What should we do with this...”

My mother pondered the situation for a little while, but with an “ah, right,” seemed to have thought of something.

“Kyousuke, I’m going out for a bit, so please go back to your room.”

“... What? You’re going out?”

“It’s not like I can do anything from here. I’m going to go buy some of the sake that your father likes. He doesn’t get drunk easily, but if he drinks enough, at least he’ll calm down.”

It was like she was trying to appease a raging demon or an Earth deity or something.

But, I understood where she was coming from. In this household, there was nothing as scary as my father's thunder.

My mother left, and for ten minutes I stayed anxiously in front of the living room door. I couldn't calm down, and prowled around while biting my nails... I strained my ears, but they were speaking in such low voices that I couldn't make out what they were saying.

Having her secret hobby exposed to our parents, how was she trying to explain it away?

I couldn't even imagine what she would say... but to that man, I couldn't see any excuse working. He was so convinced of his own beliefs that he would never concede to anyone else.

Also, he was surprisingly sharp. It wouldn't be wrong to say that he could see through lies very well.

A long, long time ago, when I was still a kid... as a prank, I stuck packing tape into a girl's long hair. To get it off, she had to cut a bit of her hair off.

Back then, I really didn't think it was a big deal... but when my father found out, not only did he give me a terrible beating, he made me cut my own hair.

Afterwards, we went so far as to go to the girl's house to apologize...

That time, I knew that what I did was wrong... but I ended up wailing and was truly miserable. But, no matter how I apologized to my father, no matter what excuses I made, he didn't listen. And he never gave me a word of forgiveness.

He was a man who, for better or worse, stayed true to his word, and would definitely do anything he was set on doing.

"... Ugh... what's going to happen..."

What kind of conversation was taking place on the far side of this door?

For a good-for-nothing coward like me, it was impossible to tell.

It was ten more minutes before Kirino appeared in the doorway. Strongly kicking the door open, Kirino flew out with a frighteningly devilish expression on her face.

Her face was bright red with anger, and her eyes were swollen and bloodshot.

... Wh-what happened...?

"Ki-Kirino...?"

"... Get out of my way... Get out!"

Kirino quickly walked towards me, and with a glare filled with hatred, pushed me out of the way. Like this, it felt like there was very little I could do to calm her down. Taken by surprise, I lost my balance.

Kirino's breathing became more and more audible as she headed towards the entranceway and began to confusedly put on her boots.

"H-hey, Kirino... where are you going?"

"Shut up! I can go where I want, right?!"

"W-wait a second."

As my sister began to leave the house, I tried to chase after her, but...

Bang! Obviously aiming for me, Kirino slammed the door shut behind her.

"Argh!" My face crashed hard into the door. "Agh... Ooh...?!"

When I recovered from my disorientation, Kirino was nowhere to be found.

... Crap. Why am I acting so uncool today?!

Ah... I could feel tears starting to well up. Dammit, my face hurt...

In my pitiable state, as I endured the pain in my face, I stared in the direction that Kirino had taken off in.

“Dammit!”

Shaking my head from side to side, I pulled myself together. I made a quick recovery, but that was one of the only things I had going for me.

... Should I chase after her? No... before that...

I returned back inside. I wasn't sure, but I was considering asking my father to tell me the details of what had happened. I had to do that if I wanted to know what had caused Kirino to get so enraged.

Although I can vaguely imagine what went on.

Also, Kirino had said that today she was going to the offline meeting to meet with friends.

Even if I don't accompany her, meeting with her friends by herself... I'm sure they had a fun time together. Arguing with Kuroneko, verbally abusing Saori who didn't care... I could imagine it, one way or the other. I had already seen such things happen with her once before.

Lately, Kirino had seemed more lively... I remembered my mother saying that, even if she wasn't being very serious.

That liveliness was probably because she had finally found companions who she could talk to about her secret hobby, right?

And, everything was going along so well... she probably couldn't imagine meeting with such a pitfall so soon.

Very cautiously, I entered the living room, and for some reason my father was handling a vacuum cleaner. In the corner of the living room, a crystal ashtray sat overturned...

Could it be that my father lost his cool and threw that...?

What in the world could have unfolded here? Anxious, I gulped.

“.....”

My father silently operated the vacuum cleaner. In the dead silence, the echoing sound of the vacuum stood out like a sore thumb.

A tense silence, the kind that persisted right after a familial conflict, dominated the mood of the room.

At long last, my father stopped vacuuming, and in a low, deep voice, mumbled this.

“Kyousuke, please sit there for a bit.”

“A-alright...”

Doing as I was told, I drew near the table and sat down on the sofa.

He was probably planning to interrogate me about Kirino’s situation. Or maybe he was going to lecture me.

Kirino was really stubborn when it came to this, so my name probably didn’t come up. But, knowing my dad, he could probably guess even without firm evidence that I was involved. It would be pointless to try and play dumb.

Well, it was what it was. I also didn’t have any intention of confessing that I had given life advice to Kirino. That was just common courtesy.

I turned my eyes to the top of the table. The damning evidence, the open DVD case, was still placed on top. Next to it, I saw a single scrap of paper.

It seemed like the scrap was an advertisement for an anime and manga specialty shop. There was a huge image of “Stardust Witch Meruru, and right underneath was this description:

“Stardust Witch Meruru 2 (First Limited Edition) has finally arrived! Customers who bring the box from a previous edition to the shop counter will receive a signed postcard by the popular voice actress Hoshino Kurara as a gift!”

...Ah, I see. With this, a few of my questions have been answered...

The day I had found her Stardust Witch Meruru package, why was she carrying the package with her outside when she didn’t have any otaku friends to call on?

And why did she have the package with her today? Well, she probably planned to bring the package to the store counter, and get a signed postcard from this Hoshino Kurara-san person.

It wasn’t something that took much time to do, so she probably thought it would be good to just do it quickly... but of all the times she could have done it, today... that was the most terrible timing.

For now, with this, I understood that when my father discovered all this, Kirino had come back from the meeting. That’s probably what happened. Once she came back, she went to her room, put Meruru into her bag, and when she thought “well, let’s go get that signed postcard,” she bumped into my father... I could imagine that flow of events. I don’t really know what happened after that, but, well, it was clear he had somehow or other seen the contents of the DVD case. And then that was enough to hold a family council like that... what a miserable story.

And then...

After having tidied the room with the vacuum, my father sat across from me.

As if by reflex, I grew anxious and corrected my posture. The first thing my father said was something like this.

“Kyousuke, did you know about this?”

“... Yeah.”

I could not respond any other way. In the first place, my father’s perception was sharpened on long years of getting criminals to confess. And now he was using that keen perception on his son. Dammit, what should I do if I piss my pants?

“I see. I won’t ask why you know about it already. I’m not here to chat.”

My father’s stare was not just frightening, but it seemed to pierce into the very center of my soul.

“.....”

How far had he guessed about my involvement with this crime? I felt my spine shiver.

“I have never bought things like this for you two. Do you know why?”

Picking up the DVD case with one hand, he spoke about both the anime drawing on the cover and the contents of the case. The 18+ indication only applied to the contents of the case, but my father did not make such a distinction.

Not being able to make any objection, I stayed silent. Trying to avoid my father’s gaze, I looked downwards.

Every time Kirino or I have received a lecture from my father, it’s always become like this.

“It is because things like this are bad influences for you two. The news also often talks about these things, how playing things like these games will rot your brain. They always find suspicious manga and games in the homes of criminals too... although of course, I don’t mean that you should just swallow every story the television tells you...”

Well, in either case, they were worthless things, right? That's what my father's facial expression was saying.

My father's understanding of the subculture was outrageously low. He would apply his so called "common adult knowledge" stereotypes to everything, and only through this filter could he view Kirino's hobbies.

... Although, just a while ago, my own opinions about otaku were similar to those of my father.

I could buy manga and CDs with my allowance, but my parents would definitely never allow me to buy games.

My prejudice against the subculture was stronger than that of the average high school student.

Games were good for nothing. People who played games were all idiots. So even though I didn't have any games, I didn't regret it... that was my logic, at least. That was what happened when a child never got the chance to play games.

For this reason, the trouble Kirino was in was quite serious.

"Well, that's how it is, more or less. People say that these things are bad influences. And also, people who only play those games all the time are... what? They're otaku, or something... and otaku are hated, right? So, nothing good can come of these things. So there is no reason for you two to buy these things."

"... But. That is..."

Just as I was barely beginning to talk, my father broke me off.

"I guess you want to tell me 'well, Kirino spent her own money.' ... I already know that, and I'm not going to dwell on that issue. Whether it was makeup, or showy clothes, or handbags... from the start, I believed that I should set down rules to control the various things that someone like her shouldn't have... but she teamed up with her mother and told me that they were necessary to make friends, so I couldn't resist anymore. I gave up and let her do what she wants."

“So makeup and handbags are alright, but anime and games are not?”

“Obviously. That world is believed to be bad, so I cannot allow Kirino to have such things. Especially since, if I do say so myself, Kirino is quite a talented daughter. If she becomes addicted to a worthless hobby, I have to correct her and put her back on the right path before she is completely lost.”

As an otaku, Kirino would be completely lost. So, he would stop that from happening. That was the gist of what my father was saying.

Honestly, by getting hooked on eroge, as a female junior high student my sister had already gone bad, so I really couldn’t say anything in response to my father.

And then...

Seeming to have finished his lecture, my father stood up from his seat and began to leave the living room.

A chill ran up my spine.

“D-dad? Where are you going...?”

Flustered, I chased after my father, and called out to him. He was trying to go up the stairs.

Up there, there was nothing but my room and Kirino’s room. Could it be...?!

My father said exactly what I had feared.

“I am going to investigate Kirino’s room. She might be hiding other things like this from me.”

“W-wait! Wait just a second please!”

Crap, Kirino’s complete collection is...!

From the foot of the stairs, I looked up at my father and held him back with my loud voice.

"And if that sort of stuff was there, mom would have already found it! She cleans that room every day! Even the ero books I had hidden in my room, she found all of them, didn't she? There isn't any reason she has anything hidden up there! The one you found in her handbag is definitely the only one she has."

Kirino had probably also told him the same thing. If for some reason, my father discovered all her other eroge, then I have no doubt that he would throw them all out. Even when faced with the unpleasant task of confronting my father, I'm positive that she would try to defend her collection to her dying breath.

"... So, I am going to investigate. If I look for them, but don't find them, then it will be fine."

No, you're definitely going to find them. After all, you're a professional at this.

If this continued, and my father entered Kirino's room, then her entire collection would be discovered.

And then, definitely, if I have to say it, my father would come to hate my sister's hobby.

I'm only trying to help you, so please stop! It's really better if you don't find out! It's not like she only has two or three of these eroge!

Just from what she showed me the last time, she had at least twenty or thirty!

Furthermore, Kirino had said there were things in there she was too embarrassed of to show me, so those things were also in there, weren't they? If my father discovers those things, if we're not careful, won't he completely blow up?

Not good... even putting it lightly, this was not good...

"W-wait a second! Dad!"

My father rapidly ascended the stairs. I chased after him hurriedly, getting in front of him and blocking his path with both arms outstretched.

“Move aside, Kyousuke.”

“I-I won’t...”

What the hell was I saying?! Was I insane?! If I go against my father now...

“Ahhhhh!!!”

My father lightly twisted my wrist, and repeated himself.

“Move aside.”

It seemed that until the very end, my father was going to try to get me to move of my own will. If he wanted to, he could just easily throw me out of the way and bulldoze his way through. As tears welled up from the pain in my wrist, I said this.

“I w-won’t... move...”

Twist twist.

The pain in my wrist intensified. In terms of making people feel pain, my father was a pro.

“Ugh...”

The pain~~~!! Ugh... seriously, the pain! What the hell am I doing?!

I seriously don’t have any idea myself!

“... Whatever the situation, just going into someone’s room without their permission and rummaging around is bad, isn’t it...? I mean, even for parents, there are things you can do and things it would be bad to do... so... I won’t move.”

I bore the pain and made my case.

It looked like I was going to try to defend my sister's collection.

Although, I have no idea what became of that girl.

Also... if your daughter is in possession of suspicious things, then as a parent it's your duty to scold her and confiscate the items.

My father was just trying to fulfill his duty as a father, and even if Kirino cried and yelled about it, it was her own fault in the end, wasn't it?

So, why in the world was I here enduring this pain, doing something that could not possibly do me personally any good?

Well... because! Somehow or other, she had taken my life advice... and furthermore I remembered how she had shown off her collection to me with such a proud expression.

I remembered how she forced me to play an eroge, and constantly asked for my impressions, how someway or other I wanted to do something for her.

And then, I remembered the McDonalds at Akiba, how they had began to argue even though it was their first time meeting, and how much fun the group of otaku seemed to be having. It really wasn't something to be thrown away, I think.

And that's why I was doing something crazy² like this...

"Dad... please leave this to me... let me talk to her. At least wait until then, please. Throwing away her precious things when she isn't even here... that's a terrible thing to do, isn't it? Please, I beg you...!"

As my pleas became desperate, my father watched me with suspicious eyes.

"You..."

² Literally, "that's why there is no pattern here."

I know exactly what you want to say, father. Why is it that I'm protecting my sister so desperately like this, when we don't seem to have a good relationship? Ahh, ahh, indeed... it's strange however you think about it, isn't it?

I personally know all too well how strange it seems!

"....."

For a while, we glared at each other in silence. With a strict expression, my father seemed to be thinking about something... at long last, he let go of my wrist.

"Alright. I will wait. I won't go into her room."

My father was a man who would honor any promise he made. He would never go back on his word.

"In my place, Kousuke, you have the duty to make sure all of these things are thrown away. All of them, without a single exception. Do you understand?"

"... I understand. I'll talk with Kirino... and I'll definitely do that."

I had no choice but to answer like that. From his order, I knew that even without going into Kirino's room, my father was convinced that she had forbidden objects there.

It can't really be helped. By standing here and resisting my father's attempts to get into her room so strongly, I might as well be loudly shouting "there are suspicious things behind this door!"

And, if I break this promise, my father might not forgive me. It's not even a complete exaggeration if I say that it wouldn't be strange if he killed me. This was a promise between two men after all.

Throw away every single thing in that collection without leaving anything behind... I had to tell Kirino that.

On top of the grave seriousness of this duty, the task would be terribly difficult and I would gain little from it.

This really wasn't something I was suited for. Can I really do it?

... Dammit. Well, Kirino... at least I bought you some time...

Although... I shouldn't expect any gratitude from her. Heh...

Chapter 4:

Part 6

Having managed to stop my father, I got my mother to hold down the fort when she returned from shopping, and went out to look for Kirino. But, I had no idea where she could have gone after rushing out of the house like that. I didn't even have a guess.

As the sun was setting, I ran off into the town without a particular destination in mind.

Don't you think I should call her cell phone? I can't! I don't know her number. My mom already said it before, didn't she? As siblings, our relationship is pretty bad. Kirino hates me as if I was some piece of garbage, and I care so little about her that I just completely ignore her.

We don't talk, and we don't even look at each other... it was a cold relationship, almost as if we didn't know each other.

That's why I didn't know my sister's cell number, I didn't want to know, and I didn't need to know.

"Dammit... where the hell did that girl go...?"

And yet, here I am running around frantically trying to find that girl I supposedly don't care about.

The park, the shopping district, the arcade, the school, in front of the train station... I could not see the conspicuously pretty form of my sister anywhere.

She's not here either...! Shit! Where else should I look... dammit.

This irritation prickling at my chest was absolutely positively *not* because I was worried about her!

I didn't know why I was getting so frustrated, but I was definitely doing something completely out of character. Isn't it painful? Isn't it annoying?

“I have no idea why I’m doing this... am I an idiot?”

This is so unlike me... this is seriously so unlike me. Ahh, dammit... dammit
dammit!

“As if I knew...”

Swallowing my confused feelings, I grit my teeth and ran.

Just like the protagonist in the game my sister lent me, Kousaka Kyousuke had flown out of his house looking for his sister, dashing into the sunset-lit town. Images of cute little sisters ran through my mind.

The difference between real life and the game, though, was that my real little sister’s affection points for me swung completely into the negative.

Unlike that idiot with a sister complex¹, I absolutely hated little sisters.

Even though I was doing the same thing he had done!

In the game, Kousaka Kyousuke met his little sister again in the city dyed with the color of dusk.

Out of breath, while looking up at the sunset, the protagonist saw his little sister appear in front of him.

Well, that was just a game.

In reality, the scene in which I found my little sister was a far cry from such a romantic scene filled with promises.

It was the evening, in the shopping district in front of the station. I was running by the side of the arcade, when...

“Ah.”

¹ Here he is referring to the protagonist of the game.

A familiar head of light brown hair was attached to someone angrily and violently striking her drumsticks against the drums in a taiko game². Completely ignoring rhythm, she continued with a *Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!*.

Do you want to break it or something?!

“.... Ahhh...haaah...”

Unconsciously, I murmured to myself.

This idiot. Even though I've been so frantically looking for her... agh, my head began to hurt.

Well, this was how it is. It wasn't that dramatic after all.

“Die! Die! Die! Diie! Die like that!”

How in the world is she whispering words like that?! Scary.

Strangely exhausted, I drew near to my highly praised sister who was in the middle of throwing an angry fit.

From behind, I lightly tapped the back of her head.

“You, die!”

“Who?!”

Bang! As Kirino turned around she swung the drumstick with her. I took it completely in the face.

“Guahh....”

“.... What.... it's just you...”

² The taiko drum is a traditional drum that is rather tall and wide. Kirino is playing a rhythm game.

Bastard... without even figuring out who I was, you hit me?! What if I was a store employee coming to tell you to calm down?! Dammit, she really can't control her anger, can she?!

However, it was hard to believe that the Kirino who had turned around and the Kirino who was so angrily yelling for people to die were one and the same. Her tone of voice and her facial expression were incredibly sorrowful.

“... What did you come here for?”

“What did I come here for... well, you ran out of the house... so I came to look for you.”

“... Gross... what the hell is that? Don’t mix up games and reality...”

‘Well, unlike the game, I don’t love you,’ I wanted to say, but I restrained myself. After playing that little sister galge, I had reaffirmed my belief...

I really didn’t need a three-dimensional little sister.

All you other brothers who have bratty conceited little sisters like this would definitely agree with me.

Seriously, what exactly was I intending to do after I found her? I can’t even remember.

In any case, she was pretty grumpy. She was even speaking through her nose.

“Shut up, you. Shouldn’t you be thanking me?”

“... Huh? Why do I have to do that?”

“Because after you left I went through a lot of trouble. Dad tried to go into your room, you know...”

“... Wha-...”

Kirino watched me with weepy eyes, and began to tighten her hands over the back of my neck. Ahh! That hurts!

“... And you stopped him, right?”

Bastard, why do you say that as if it’s obvious? I’m your brother, not your manservant. Hey, you understand that, don’t you?

“O-of course I stopped him... I risked my life for you.”

“Alright.”

Good job, dog. That was the kind of “alright” that came out of her mouth. Well, to some extent I was just getting what I deserved, but all traces of my dignity had been lost. Kirino let go of me, and with a strained face crossed her arms.

“... For now, let’s go somewhere else. We stand out too much here.”

Chapter 4:

Part 7

We found a nearby Starbucks and moved there.

Even though it was early summer, it was slowly growing dark.

Dressed in plain clothes, Kirino and I sat across from each other in front of a small round table, and drank coffee.

The guests in this place were generally college students and office workers who were coming back from work. Junior high students, perhaps coming back from club activities, were nowhere to be seen.

We were in the middle of that. What did the people around us think of us, I wonder?

We had not said a single word to each other since before.

Wearing an angry aura, Kirino had been continually glaring at me with her bloodshot eyes...

If people thought we were a couple in an argument... or even worse, if we were in an argument because I was cheating on her... that would be terrible.

Not being able to bear the silence any longer, I spoke without really thinking.

“Hey... Kirino.”

“What?”

“What are you going to do? After this.”

“... I don’t know.”

As I thought. If she went back home, my father would be there. I’m not surprised she doesn’t know what to do.

In fact, Kirino asked me just that. "... What do you think I should do?" she asked.

This was the second time I've heard those words coming out of my sister's mouth.

I really don't think I'm that sort of dependable older brother. But here, she was in such a rut and had no choice but to depend on me, and I felt cornered. It was the same as that other time.

That's why I couldn't respond with "How should I know?" here. Even if that's really what I thought.

Throw away everything, without leaving a single one. I still haven't told Kirino what was said to me. In our house, my father's word was absolute. What would she think when I told her that he had resolved to destroy her entire prized collection?

It would be troublesome if she threw a fit here. For now, I have to figure out what exactly happened.

"Before we talk about anything else, Kirino, there are a few things I want to ask you. Is that okay?"

"... What?"

"What exactly did dad say to you? You two really seemed to be deep in conversation."

From my father's remarks, I don't think he had told her anything about throwing away her collection.

I asked this question to clarify exactly what position Kirino had been put in.

"... H-hey... Kirino...?"

Unexpectedly, at that moment, Kirino panicked.

"...!?!?"

It was the moment I had asked my question. Kirino's face flushed bright red, and her entire body began to shake.

Holding her chest with one hand, her other hand tightened into a fist on top of the table.

Her cute face was jumbled up. I quickly looked away, but even so, I could feel the extent of the violent emotions stirring inside her, to the point where it was quite unpleasant.

Anger. Regret. And, just a bit of resignation.

Frustration. Frustration. Frustration frustration frustration frustration frustration... and sadness.

Those kinds of unbearable feelings were keenly being transmitted to me.

What exactly happened in the living room back then? What did they talk about? I still really don't know.

But, just by how Kirino was acting right now, I could guess that something must have happened.

"... hless..."

My sister, with her head downcast, whispered darkly.

When I nervously asked "W-what?" Kirino violently beat her hand on the table.

Bang!

"He called them worthless!! The anime I like! My games! The offline meeting I was going to today! Everything everything everything!! ... E... even though... they're... not like that...and I... I couldn't..."

After that, she degraded into mostly sobbing, and I couldn't really make out what she was saying.

As she hit the table with her fist, Kirino kept her head down and convulsed with sobs.

“You couldn’t say anything back... could you?”

“... Yeah...”

Drip, drip. Her tears fell in drops onto the table.

As the person she had come to for life advice, it took me not too long to understand what was happening.

Today, Kirino had faced my father’s wrath. Her important things, which she had shown me that time, were being trampled underfoot.

That’s why Kirino was now so angry. That’s why she was deathly frustrated, and why tears were flowing from her eyes.

They might seem relatively silly, but I too had things that were important to me.

If he had dismissed those things as worthless, even I would have blown up in anger.

Definitely. Even if it was with my father, I would strike out. If I didn’t do that, I wouldn’t be able to calm down.

Kirino feels the same way, doesn’t she?

“I couldn’t say anything back... and then... I took the crystal ashtray and tried to hit him with it... but he caught my arm... ahh... this is so frustrating...”



Finding a blunt weapon there so quickly... she's seriously pretty frightening. I couldn't hear much of what was going on in there, but to think such a battle was unfolding...

I take back what I said about having the same feelings.

She wasn't trying to strike out at him... she was trying to kill him!

"Here, Kirino, use this handkerchief."

"... Ugh... dammit... my makeup..."

I gave her a handkerchief, and she wiped her face. She then excused herself from the table for a little while.

She fixed her makeup. And in the meantime, we both calmed down, and started over.

"Huh..."

Hey, assholes. What are you looking at? I glared at the people around me, and the inquisitive stares quickly turned away.

I'm glad that we're here at this time. At this time, neither Kirino's nor my classmates should be around to see what's happening.

As I downed the rest of my iced coffee, Kirino came back with all her makeup taken off.

Quietly, she sat down across from me.

... It's not like I would ever say this out loud, but she's pretty cute without makeup on, isn't she?

Because I was thinking that...

"... Hey?"

“H-hm? W-what?”

I suddenly spoke up in a rather suspicious way.

The makeup-less Kirino then began to talk, in a very subdued tone of voice.

“... Do you think... I’m weird? Liking that kind of stuff... is it bad?”

“Kirino...”

Looking at me with tear-filled eyes like that, what exactly am I supposed to respond with?

“At the very least, that’s what dad said. But it’s not like he was being especially strict. Any normal parent would say something like that, I think that’s obvious. You said it yourself, right? You have a public image to maintain, so you can’t expose your secret to anyone else.”

“But... I mean... already... it’s already been exposed...”

“Yeah. So, it’s too late for that. We can’t change the fact that it’s been exposed.”

I spoke with as much sincerity and goodwill as I could muster.

“So, you have to choose.”

After saying that, I fell silent. I focused intently on my sister’s eyes.

“You mean... whether or not to give this hobby up?”

“If you can do that, then this all will end peacefully. If you stop being an otaku, your problems will vanish. Dad will stop being angry, and the constantly ticking bomb that’s always ticking away next to your public image will also go away... lately, I’ve heard a lot of rumors about you, you know. That you’re amazing. You’re great at sports, you excel at schoolwork, you work as a model, you’re also in an afterschool club... you’re really managing to do some very difficult things. I

honestly believe that. And, without that one hobby, you would be absolutely perfect, don't you think...? Do you understand what I'm trying to say?"

"... I know. I know more than anybody that I'm good at a lot of things. If I stop being an otaku, just about everything would be perfect... I've known that from the start."

Kirino tapped lightly on the table with her fist. Calmed down, she spoke.

"But, I won't stop. I definitely, absolutely won't stop. Because... the things I like... I *really* like them! For me to stop anyways... I don't want to do that. I can't do that..."

"I see. But as far as dad's concerned, this has nothing to do with your feelings. You have to correct yourself if you're doing something bad... he'll say that to you until your ears fall off, won't he? No matter how much you like these things, to dad they'll always be good for nothing and worthless. And if he tries to force you to stop, we can't really do anything about it, can we?"

"Even so!"

Kirino shouted with a serious expression. It was an expression I would someday be impressed by.

"I won't stop. I won't stop doing what I like to do. You said it yourself before, didn't you? I am both sides of me... if I got rid of one of those sides... if I stopped doing one of them, I wouldn't be myself anymore. I know that I'm a child, so I have to listen to what my father says. That's obvious, so I can't resist what he says... but, even if my entire collection is thrown away... even if that becomes no more, I would still be the same person... so, the one thing I definitely won't do, is stop doing the things I like to do."

... That's what she said.

Even if her entire collection were thrown out.

Even if her cell phone and computer were taken away, and she couldn't connect to the internet anymore.

She wouldn't stop being an otaku. She would definitely not stop. Because that's what she likes.

If I got rid of one of those sides, I wouldn't be myself anymore...

"I see."

You're an idiot. Seriously an idiot. I can't believe how much of an idiot you are.

Are anime and eroge really that important? You have to be stubborn and defend them to your dying breath? I don't understand. Seriously, I don't understand at all. It's a hobby that nobody would praise you for, so why do you think it's so important? How can you be having fun with these things, collecting them, raising a fuss about them?

Ahh... geez... it's not like otaku are all like this.

Even so, it's not like I expected her to say anything different.

"It's not bad."

"Huh?"

I spoke with a brazen smile to my confused little sister.

"I said it's not bad. That's my answer to the question you asked before."

What did I just do? I'm acting strangely today... or rather, I've been acting strangely lately. The normal me... the me of only a month ago... would never even have dreamed of trying to stop my father like that.

I would also never have guessed that I would come looking for the little sister I hated and wanted nothing to do with.

And I would have never guessed that I would feel this way after hearing her pitiful speech.

Tch. Clicking my tongue once, with a strange feeling oozing its way through me, I slowly stood up.

“Kirino.”

Looking at Kirino’s face, I pointed at my own face with my thumb.

“Leave it to me.”

In the seventeen years of my life, this was the most out-of-character thing I have ever said.

It’s almost as if I was really Kirino’s older brother.

Chapter 4: Part 8

What the hell did I say? Am I an idiot?

As I hurriedly returned home, I seethed with intense self-hatred.

Kirino was still at the Starbucks. I gave her clear instructions to wait there for an hour, and then to head home afterwards. I was really the only one talking and I never heard a response from her, so it's unclear whether or not she actually heard what I was saying.

In either case, until she actually felt determined enough to head back, she wouldn't return home.

Before that, I intended to settle the matter with my father.

"Heh..."

I don't care if you laugh at me. I think I'm an idiot for doing this too. Seriously an idiot.

Why did I have to say "Leave it to me"? Agh, my cheeks are burning... I can't stand how embarrassing that was.

It felt like fire was spouting from my head. Why did I have to try and act so cool, even though I'm really not...?

After this, even if it seems impossible, I'm going to confront my father.

And if I'm hit and broken, I would let my head be shaved and live out the rest of my life as a monk.

But, I mean, I can't help it!

'Throw away everything in your room.' 'Stop being an otaku.'

Could I really say those things to her?! Not only did I understand her feelings, but anybody who says such things I can't forgive! Even if that person is my father!

... Of course, I hate that cheeky bastard of a sister.

I don't need such extraordinary characters in my life. She seems to hate me too, so it would be best if we just continued to ignore each other.

From the very start, these opinions of mine have never changed.

I don't care about that girl. Seriously, from the bottom of my heart, I don't care.

Do you think that's strange? Do you think it's a lie, that my actions contradict my words?

... Well, I wonder. Even I don't really understand myself today.

Everything I was doing was sincere... but maybe, there was something that even I wasn't aware of. I also didn't understand this strange feeling that was welling up from inside my chest.

Right now, there was really only one thing that I understood.

Kirino would never call me this, not even once, but...

I'm her big brother.

Whether or not I hate her, whether or not I don't care about her, whether or not she's an annoying brat...

I have to help my little sister.

That's how it is, right?

Chapter 4:

Part 9

Thirty minutes later, I found myself standing outside the door to our living room.

In a bag I held in one hand, I had a little secret weapon. It was something that I, mustering all the feeble mental powers I possessed, had thought of while running home.

With my mother's help, somehow or other I prepared everything as I had planned. Putting the finishing touches on, I instructed my mother not to come into the room, and with that the preparations were complete.

But... honestly, there really wasn't any guarantee that this would go well. To put it bluntly, the possibility that this idea would crash and burn was pretty high.

"Heh..."

Even so, I would brave it. It wasn't for my sister, but rather it was for my own sake.

Argh, dammit! I'm just going to bite the bullet and do it!!

My fighting spirit renewed, I opened the door to the living room.

I was hit with the sweet fragrance of alcohol. Advancing into the lion's den, I felt like Minamoto no Yorimitsu¹.

My father was sitting on the sofa, drinking sake with a sake cup. Noticing me coming in, he glanced at me and scowled.

"Kyousuke, don't forget your manners."

"I-I'm home."²

¹ A Heian period Japanese military leader.

² "Tadaima," the polite way to announce that you have returned home.

Crap crap crap crap! This isn't funny! What's with this extreme intensity...

Even in the best of times he wore an evil expression, but maybe because of his anger, he looked even more evil now.

I had pumped myself up for this, but I felt the wind being immediately knocked out of my sails.

I couldn't stop my skin from tingling with goosebumps. I gulped down a mouth full of saliva, and carefully, carefully continued into the room. After all, I didn't want to go right in front of him.

As I prayed that he wouldn't look my way, I came to a stop around three meters from him on the side.

Do you think I'm pitiful? But this is a place where beginners would fail... and honestly, if you stood in my position, you would understand. Imagine being next to a hungry beast, who at any second would start growling. Furthermore, I really didn't even want to take one step closer to him... I mean, I'll confess that I already can feel tears welling up in my eyes.

"D-dad... I have something I want to talk about."

Trying desperately to keep my voice from trembling, I began to talk.

Before responding, my father gulped down another cup of sake³.

"Did you find Kirino?"

"... Yeah... I came to talk... to you."

"And?"

My father pressed me without paying me even a glance. Honestly, I was grateful. Eventually I would have to look him in the eye and make my case, but for now I really wanted to avoid eye contact.

³ Sake cups are very small, so don't be alarmed.

Because I was scared.

“.....”

The surrounding atmosphere became very heavy. It was strangely hot, and I had trouble breathing. And yet, I couldn't stop myself from shaking.

Sweat began to pour down my face, spilling off the bottom of my jaw.

“And?”

My father pressed me once more with the same words. I opened my mouth, feeling like I was jumping off a precipitous cliff.

“I would like you... to approve of Kirino's hobby.”

It may be my imagination, but the moment I said that, the room fell gravely silent.

The only sounds I could hear were those of my own heartbeat and my ragged breaths.

“Kyousuke.”

Talking low and without expression, my father responded.

“Earlier, I told you that it was your duty to throw away all those things. Every single piece, without leaving a single one. And you responded 'I understand. I'll talk with Kirino, and I'll definitely do that.' Isn't that right?”

“Yeah.”

“Honor the promises that you make.”

After his short statement, he once again fell into silence. ... I see. What he's saying is correct. However you think about it, the person who's mistaken is me. I understand that.

But... I can't retreat now.

"That's what I wanted to talk about."

"Are you breaking a promise that you made? When did I teach you to do that?"

Each one of my father's words echoed heavily. Gritting my teeth, I raised my voice.

"It has nothing to do with me. She won't let anyone stop her, and won't let anybody throw away the things she's been hiding. She also won't listen to reason. Please listen to me, dad. Listen to my reasons for doing what I did."

"... Go ahead. Discipline will follow."

Waah. I said that pretty assertively, but I might seriously burst into tears.

I obviously couldn't see my own face, but if this pitiful face were exposed, before even listening to me he would probably beat me. Thank the heavens I'm not standing right in front of him.

Are you watching, beginners? This is an expert's strategy!

... Ugh. Let's keep my misery from growing too much, shall we? I wiped my face with my T-shirt.

"Certainly... Kirino's hobby is not something an average girl would have. So, in her usual crowds there wasn't really anybody who shared her hobby."

Taking a single breath, I continued.

"... So, she tried to find friends who had the same hobby... and, she looked in a lot of different places, and somehow or other found some good people... she even met them in real life for the first time."

"...."

My father continued drinking his sake at a deliberate pace, and silently listened to me. Right now, I was speaking without any regard to my personal well-being, so it wouldn't be strange if my father already had decided in his mind on giving me the death penalty.

The pressure of silence was extremely frightening. If I think about it, today was pretty unpleasant for my father as well.

To think that his beloved daughter whom he's raised all these years would come out and say "Actually, I love eroge."

And, when he tried to scold her and set her straight, she tried to beat him to death with an ashtray.

On top of that, his untalented son then came in, uninvited, and begins to chatter about defending his sister's outrageous hobby.

And he's also in the middle of drinking sake. My actions were really inexcusable. I believed that from the bottom of my heart.

You probably want to beat me now, but please be patient with me for a little while longer.

"... That was just recently. Today, she was coming back from meeting those friends in an offline meeting... I mean, a meeting for people with the same hobby... you probably already heard this, right?"

"... Uh-huh."

"And then, you called her hobby worthless... don't make fun of her when she's tried so hard! Even though you don't know that much about her hobby, you're making such quick judgments about it!"

Because my sister regrettably couldn't say anything, I was telling him what my sister felt in her place.

Even though these weren't supposed to be my feelings, even though this entire situation really wasn't my business, I was honestly getting angry.

At some point, this was no longer "somebody else's problem."

"With my own eyes, I've seen her 'important things.' I've also met with people who love the same things. Ahh, of course there's prejudice against them, and there's no helping that, since they really are an odd bunch. How they speak, how they act, how they dress - at any rate it's all pretty odd. Honestly, I can't understand where they're coming from at all. But!"

I remembered. That scene in Akiba, and my own feelings.

"It's really not a bad thing, I think. They really seem like they have fun when they're together. Even though it was their first time meeting, they could argue so loudly, and raise so much of a commotion. They really love what they love! Kirino, and those others, being able to get seriously angry like that - it's not something to be taken lightly! Kirino, and those others, being able to get so entranced by the things they love... seeing it, I felt sort of embarrassed, but at that time, they were already dear companions! Frankly speaking, they were already friends!"

Just a while ago, I would never have imagined that I could behave so heatedly. But, now is now, and I was surprised by each word as it came out of my mouth.

To think that there was such a ferocious person inside of me. Ordinarily, commonly, the everyday me had a creed to live a carefree, laid back life. Even now, that still hasn't changed.

But, the me of today, with certainty, is different than the me of a little while ago.

Giving her life advice, having to experience various annoying things, seeing lots of things that I can't even begin to understand... all that has influenced me. It wasn't Kirino; I was the one who had changed.

I didn't want to admit that I had been influenced by such weird people and such random things I couldn't understand. But it was the truth, so I couldn't help it.

From those people, I got something, and changed. I became an idiot. I became an embarrassing person.

Whether I'm seconds away from crying or not.

To think that I could stand up against my frightening father like this.

"Of course, I can't even begin to understand her hobby. I really can't! But! Is something you can be entranced by like that, can that something really be that bad?! If you think about it, shouldn't that be a pretty important thing?! Right?! That's not something you can so casually throw away, you know!"

"So, you want me to forgive her? For a worthless hobby that can have nothing but a bad influence."

My father stood up and faced me. He pierced my heart with a gaze that was a hundred time scarier than anything Kirino could pull off.

Crap, I'm really going to piss myself. In a moment, I'm going to fall to the floor and beg.

"You say that it's nothing but a bad influence, that it's a worthless hobby...?"

It was here. I decided to play my trump card. I quickly closed the distance between me and my father, and dumped out everything in the bag onto the table. *Bang!* The first thing I threw at my father was Kirino's report card.

"Just look at these unbelievable grades. She's even one of the best in the entire prefecture. And her great performance isn't limited to just the present. If there's anyone who knows how well she's been doing in school, it should be you, dad."

"So what? Kirino is just keeping the promise she made to me. That's all it is. That's why I can forgive her for wearing such flashy outfits, and can allow her to be a model."

"There's more..."

The next things I threw at him were numerous trophies and awards. The most recent one was from a big track and field tournament just last year.

“Look at this. And this. And this and this...! Just look at it! Second place, outstanding, excellent... they’re all like that! This one she got when she was still in elementary school! This one is from kindergarten! ... How can she have so many, dammit?! I was so surprised when I was collecting these! See?! Dad! Your daughter is so incredible, don’t you see?!”

“I know. So what?”

“Don’t say ‘So what?’! You’re being really petty⁴ ! To be that good at sports and to be that smart, and also to have so many other talents... she’s so talented, so different from me! Isn’t that amazing?! So what if she has one, and only one, strange hobby?! Isn’t it fine?! Look at all her other talents! Your daughter, your pride and joy, has just one thing you can’t tolerate, and just because of that, you lecture her to death, you make her cry, you try to throw away her important things... isn’t that right?!”

“That was just a father disciplining his child.”

Dammit. I had tried with all my might to appeal to my father, but he didn’t seem the least bit moved.

But, I still had more! *Bang!* I threw a very thick book at him.

“... It’s Kirino’s album. So what?”

My father’s tone of voice softened just a bit. In that beautiful thick album there were large numbers of photographs of Kirino, from the time she was born until now.

Photos of a baby Kirino sleeping in her crib. Photos of my mother holding her.

⁴ Literally, “your asshole is small.”

Photos of her playing a leading role during her kindergarten's sports festival.
Photos of her shichigosan⁵. Photos of her kindergarten graduation ceremony.
Photos of her elementary school entrance ceremony. Photos of her finishing first at an athletic meet. Etc. etc.

Of course, all the photos were taken personally by my father, with a single lens ridiculously high-end camera.

Just with this album, it was obvious what my father thought of Kirino.

But there was not even a single photograph of me.

"Kyousuke... I asked you why you brought this out."

"Don't rush me..."

Bang! I threw another thinner book at him. My father's expression suddenly changed.

"...?!"

"... I asked mom and she lent this to me. This is dad's treasured possession, isn't it?"

The book I had shown my father was a scrapbook. In it were arranged cutouts from a teen magazine. These cutouts were all of a familiar light brown haired model, wearing the latest fashions and posing confidently.

The photos went on and on, on and on. For dozens of pages.

It's likely that from Kirino's debut to the present, every precious photo of her was in here for safekeeping.

I'm not a father, so I can't understand my father's feelings when it comes to his daughter.

⁵ A rite of passage for children in Japan where 3 and 7 year old girls and 3 and 5 year old boys visit shrines. Shichigosan literally means "seven five three."

However, I could at least make a rough guess.

"You were happy, weren't you? You keep on saying that you're unimpressed, that you don't care, but you buy all her magazines, you cut out all her pictures, you collect them..."

"... Don't say stupid things. I had to keep track of what kind of things she was doing for her job."

That remark... so it was just because she was his daughter...

"And? You had to keep track... and what did you find out? Was it the same kind of showy, flashy job that you were prejudiced again?"

I spoke while turning through the scrapbook page by page.

"It was different, wasn't it. If it wasn't, you wouldn't have kept this scrapbook so carefully all this time like some kind of treasure... that's true, isn't it?"

I felt like I was walking on a tightrope. My eyes met those of my father. Scary. I didn't flinch, and I didn't look away.

My father let out a long exhale.

"But, it's not something she needs to hide. Even now, though, I'm not sure what to think about that."

"Then, how about this?"

From my chest pocket, I threw the last photo at him.

"!"

It was a picture of Kirino, Kuroneko, and Saori.

This was a photo that Saori had just taken today with her cell phone camera.

While I was talking with Kirino at the Starbucks, I had looked through the photos on her cell phone and printed this out... she definitely argued before letting me borrow this though.

“Is this also something you need to hide?”

“.....”

It was a photo of Kirino with her friends at the offline meeting.

The three people squeezed close together to fit into the small frame of the shot.

One person was standing in front with her arms outstretched, leisurely setting up the cell phone camera.

The other two were in the middle of the argument, but somehow still managed to look at the camera.

“It’s a worthless hobby that can only have a bad influence on her?”

I could almost hear their loud chatter... and behind their scowls their true feelings were hidden... it was that kind of pleasant photograph. At least, that’s how I saw it.

“You might not want to admit it, but this is something that she has!”

And then...

“This album where she’s with the family too... and these pictures of her modeling, and these pictures of her wearing the latest fashions, and these pictures of her stylishly posing. And even these photos of her with her otaku friends, raising a fuss with scowls on their faces... *all* of these are Kirino! Only when *all* of these things are there is she Kirino! If even one is missing, she wouldn’t be herself anymore!”

The words I was speaking right now were precisely the words Kirino had said to me some time ago.

But, it's not that I was trying to say these things in her place.

These words that I was throwing at my father welled up from deep inside me, and were my own sincere feelings.

I gripped my father's collar and continued my plea.

"Don't you see...? Looking at this, if you still can't accept her hobby... if you still can't, then I'll strike you down in her place! If you don't know anything about something, don't judge it like that!"

As my father gave me a grave stare, he responded.

"... I understand what you're saying."

Blood vessels popped up on his evil-looking face, and his expression became terrifying.

He's seriously a demon. I flinched a bit while still holding onto his collar.

"For now, I will take back what I said about her hobby being worthless. I agree that I do not know anything. I acknowledge as well that I am prejudiced against these things. Alright, then. I will defer to you and forgive her for having this hobby."

"... S-seriously?!"

By this time, I had already given it all I had.

I was shouting, fueled solely by the momentum, without a shred of a logical argument. It was honestly a jumbled up petition.

But even so, through my frantic efforts, it seems that I had gotten something through to him.

'I will forgive her for having this hobby'... the moment these words were spoken, I had won this battle.



But my father continued.

"I won't repeat myself. But there is one more thing. I cannot possibly ignore the indecent contents of that case. This is not a question of whether it's good or bad. This isn't related to whether or not I know about these things, or whether or not I have prejudice against these things. This is about the fact that this was an 18+ product."

Ah, at last, this issue came up... I let go of my father's collar, and with a pained expression lapsed into silence.

There was no ignoring the logic behind my father's words. If it's an 18+ product, then it would be bad if someone under 18 had it.

But, if my father went through with what he was saying... then we would have to throw away the majority of Kirino's collection. That would be defeating the purpose.

But however I thought about it, my father was right. He was right, but... there was room for argument. After all, I had predicted that eventually we would come to this point. And so, just in case, I had thought of a few ways of dealing with this.

"....."

I had prepared for this... but honestly speaking, this was the one topic I didn't want to discuss.

This was the first time I felt such a storm of conflict raging in my chest.

Is this seriously alright? For that little sister, am I really prepared to go this far?

But, today, I was acting strangely all around. I was completely, impossibly nuts.

Because of that... I had already made up my mind to decisively push forwards in this direction.

I spoke.

“... Ki-kirino doesn’t have any age-restricted things...”

Upon hearing my words, my father closed his eyes as if he was trying to restrain himself, and his eyelids began to tremble. And then, suddenly, he opened his eyes.

“Gah!”

Grabbing the nape of my neck and strongly pulling me, he put the back of my head in a lock, and forcibly made me face the DVD case. Ugghh, that really hurts!

The item in question was in the case. The 18+ label sparkled conspicuously.

“You... at this point you’re still trying to lie to me...?!”

“I-I’m not!”

I had gotten something from those people, and I had changed. I had become an idiot. I had become an embarrassing person.

For that reason, I could put such a ridiculous plan like this into action.

“THIS IS MINE!”

For me, this was the worst thing I have ever said in my life.

“This is definitely not Kirino’s! I’m the one who owns it, it’s mine! So it’s alright if you don’t throw it away, isn’t it?!”

This was a scene that you will never see again, so be sure to pay close attention.

Blood vessels appeared on the demon’s forehead, and he responded expressionlessly.

“... I don’t understand these things that much, but this is something you play in a computer... and in this house, the only person with a computer... should be Kirino...”

... He's more well-informed than I thought... I had to come up with an excuse in the spur of the moment.

"That's because... Kirino lent me her computer!"

"... I-I see... Y-y-you used your sister's computer, in her room, to play games in which you do indecent things to little sisters?"

"It was really fun! You got a problem with that?"

He struck my face. I took a huge tumble and collided with the wall.

Am I a dumbass?! At the very least, I should have said that I used a laptop to play it in my room!

".... O... ooh...."

My field of vision flickered. The taste of blood filled my mouth. My head pounded, and I began to lose consciousness. Ah, dammit... I'm going to die...

But, not just yet! As if I could bear to let it end here...!

In my collapsed state, I raised my head, and with tears in my eyes continued my plea.

Listen to me...! Listen to my saintly, virtuous explanation!

"In any case, that's mine, I said! I'm a high school student, so having 18+ ero⁶ books is ok, right?! Even mom, when she found my collection under my bed, said it was ok!! And, how is that game different from the books?! Is there really a difference?! Is there?! There isn't, is there?! So don't you dare throw them away! You better listen well, dad. Anime and eroge... I. LOVE. THEM!! You could say I adore them! If you throw these away, I won't be me anymore! Eroge are my heart and soul...!!"

⁶ "Ero" basically is a shortening of "erotic." So it means pornographic. This is one of the words I will leave in Japanese throughout this translation, so please take note if you did not know what this meant already.

With all the power I had left, I let out a desperate, jumbled up scream.

“UNDERSTAAAAAAAAND?!?!?!”

Receiving the full brunt of my soulful cry, my father teetered around as if dizzy.

“Y-you... you...”

As if he had been dealt a severe blow to his head, my father grasped his temples.

“You idiot son!! Do whatever the hell you want!! I don’t care!!”

What a huge yell. I haven’t ever seen him flip out like this before.

But, it didn’t seem like he was planning to kill me. Breathing deeply and moving his shoulders up and down, he quickly turned around and with loud footsteps left the room.

Alright, this was my victory. While my nose bled and I held onto my face, a smile floated to the surface.

Hmph... how’s that, Kirino... your collection... I protected every piece, without leaving a single one.

Heh heh heh... even though, as you could expect, I did it in a pretty sloppy way.

Chapter 4: Part 10

The loud turmoil of the Kousaka household had calmed down by the following morning.

When I arrived at the usual meeting place, my bespectacled childhood friend, as always, was already waiting there for me. And, also as always, swinging her bag forwards and backwards in front of her skirt, she called to me with a smile.

“Kyou-chan, good morning.”

“Ah, good morning, Manami.”

It was an exceedingly normal, commonplace morning.

Ahh, this feels great. As I thought, this was how I wanted to spend everyday.

My name is Kousaka Kyousuke. I’m seventeen and attend a local high school.

It may be strange coming from me, but I’m an exceedingly normal male high school student.

This morning, like all other mornings, found me walking to school at a leisurely, laid-back pace with my normal childhood friend.

Well, are you a bit jealous? To be normal means to just keep pace with your surroundings, to live with both feet on the ground. And security means not living dangerously.

Mediocrity, banzai! Viva the normal life.

But, I mean, living an extraordinary and dangerous life has its good points too.

Lately, I’ve began to think that as well.

It’s fun, noisy, and sometimes outrageously embarrassing.

It's a lifestyle where you live your own way, take your feet off the ground, and fly through the air.

I have experienced such things with this very body.

"K-kyou-chan. What's with that face?"

"Hm? Ahh, this?

Is my face so plain that it's surprising? Well, that I won't deny, but Manami was probably talking about the huge bandage on my face.¹

"Well... lots of things have happened."

Geez. That's the honest truth – lots of things *have* happened... these few days have been especially tense and eventful... so much so that I probably won't forget these happenings for the rest of my life.

That bratty little sister who looks at me as if I was garbage. Her secret hobby, and our life advice sessions.

In these past few days, I've spoken to her enough to last for many decades. And, I feel as if I've learned just a smidgen more about her, about things that I did not know before.

But. Even then, there's no reason for our cold relationship to change.

As always, I hated my little sister, and didn't care what she did.

And she, just as she's always been, ignored me this morning as if I was some pebble by the side of the road.

Well, that's how life worked. Nothing changes that easily.

¹ He says congealing medicine, or something. Whatever. It's a bandage.

Do you think it's strange? Do you think that, to go through such an intense few days, to have exerted so much effort to help her, it was all meaningless if my sister's affection points for me didn't soar through the roof?

This isn't a joke! Don't bring back those unpleasant memories! This isn't like that first game I played; in real life, fundamentally, things don't always pay off. Especially in my life!

Whoops, I got a bit sidetracked there. Let's get back on topic. Uhhh... of course, there's no denying that yesterday I helped my little sister. I persuaded my father to approve of her hobby, after all.

However, it's not like I did that because I wanted her gratitude. And it's not like I did it because I wanted something in return. I might be just repeating what a certain someone somewhere said, but...

I just did what I wanted to do. By interfering, I was just doing as I pleased.

So, the compensation that I received from this affair, came from inside me. It was not something that anybody else could give to me.

"I see... lots of things happened..."

"Yup. Lots of things happened."

It wasn't something anybody else could give to me.

"Good work, Kyoushan... you tried hard, didn't you?"

My childhood friend paid me a loose, appreciative compliment, even though she didn't know anything about what had happened.

"Perhaps."

Indeed, I had been repaid aplenty.

Chapter 4:

Part 11

It was after school on the same day. Coming home from school, I saw my sister in the living room on her phone, just like she was on that one day some time ago.

“I’m home.”

For now, I gave a greeting out of courtesy, but not only did I not get a response, she didn’t even look in my direction.

In her sailor uniform ¹, she sat deep in the couch with her legs crossed in her extremely short skirt. She was on her cell phone and giggling about something or other.

Certainly, that smile was cute, but it would never be directed at me.

As I was thinking these thoughts...

“Huh?! Did you *really* watch it?! The DVD edition?! Then how the hell did you come to *that* conclusion?! I can’t believe it, I guess that’s what I get for asking for the opinion of a jakigan girl ²... well, whatever... you should seriously get over being so emo . See ya.”

What kind of conversation was that supposed to be...?

I watched in interest as Kirino nonchalantly cut off the conversation and tossed her cell phone away from her.

Well, even she’s changed a little from before, perhaps.

Even without me, she seems to be doing well... doesn’t she?

At any rate, with this, all her problems have been resolved.

¹ Girl uniforms in Japan are often just sailor outfits.

² See Note 12 in Chapter 3-4.

So, again, in terms of the unusual life advice sessions... my work was done.

While I continued to talk to myself in my head, I opened up the refrigerator. I took out a pack of wheat tea, poured it in a glass, and gulped it down.

Sigh. Filled with many emotions, I let out a heavy breath.

Feelings of relief, of satisfaction, and of just a bit of loneliness passed through my head.

Shrugging my shoulders, I tried to leave the room.

“Hey.”

“... Hm?”

I stopped with my hand on the doorknob, and turned my head.

As I turned, my sister, in her usual blunt way, said something unthinkable.

“I still need life advice.”

..... seriously?

Falling deeply into despair, my eyes blurred with tears.

Grasping the doorknob more tightly, I stiffened.

“And... also, uh...”

Kirino hesitated, and our eyes met.

It was only one word. With an awkward smile...

“Thanks, aniki.³”

³ Aniki is a term of endearment for older brothers. I decided not to translate it because “brother” just sounds so much stiff and formal in English.



She said that, her words clear.

Afterwards, she quickly turned the other way.

She might have been slightly blushing.

“.....”

With my mouth hanging open and eyes staring, I couldn't do anything except be dumbfounded.

I mean... this was impossible, wasn't it... ?

As I wondered if I was seeing or hearing things, a thought passed into my head.

My sister can't possibly be this cute.

**END CHAPTER 4
END VOLUME 1**

Afterwords

Good afternoon, this is Fushimi Tsukasa. I see that this new series was able to reach you safely.

Thank you very much for reading this book.

This book is a comedy about a brother and a sister who don't get along and are very different, in both appearance and habits. This is this author's first attempt at writing a long comedy.

In order to make everyone laugh, I put all my efforts into writing this.

I tried to make this easy and fun to read, so if my work makes you laugh, there would be no surpassing the joy I would feel.

My editors, Miki-san and Koba-san, have been so amazingly supportive through this process. To be honest, this book's planning - and in particular in the creation of the idea of the "little sister," - were due to Miki-san. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say he was pulling the strings in the shadows.

I must mention that this work was not merely the product of one writer, but would not have been possible without the dozens of private meetings the three of us had.

After counting the number of times they read my manuscript and the number of times they gave me advice, I feel it is impossible to properly thank them. Honestly, thank you very much.

I apologize for complaining all the time. Next time, I know I will throw all my anxiety and frustrations at these two, but please tolerate it and continue to support me.

The illustrations were done by Kanzaki Hiro-san, who draws cute girls (especially nekomimi)¹. “I’ve brought you the best nekomimi artist in the world!” was what the editor in charge of finding an artist told me, and after that he proudly showed me some of Kanzaki-san’s cover illustrations. Of course, I shared his feelings.

In the final revision stages, the rough illustrations I was sent were the source of my inspiration. Thank you very much. I look forward to working with you next time as well.

Otherwise, thank you very much to everyone else involved in the publication process.

With Kanzaki Hiro-san, I am in the planning stages for a new work.

We should be able to say more about it by the end of the year, so please stay tuned.

- June 2008, Fushimi Tsukasa.

¹ Cat ears.

Project Leader and Translator : NanoDesu

Editor : Meh

Editor : Irrelevant

Editor : WildKaiser

Editor : Saki

Typesetter : VictorRama



おれの妹がこんなに可愛いわけがない

俺の妹・高坂桐乃は、茶髪にピアスのいわゆるイマドキの女子中学生で、身内の俺が言うのもなんだが、かなりの美人ときたもんだ。けれど、コイツは兄の俺を平気で見下してくるし、俺もそんな態度が気にくわないので、ここ数年まともに口なんか交わしちゃいない。よく男友達からは羨ましがられるが、キレイな妹がいても、いいことなんて一つもないって声を大にして言いたいね（少なくとも俺にとっては）！

だが俺はある日、妹の秘密に関わる超特大の地雷を踏んでしまう。まさかあの妹から“人生相談”をされる羽目になるとは——!?



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ふしみ
伏見つかさ

早いものでデビュー三周年を迎みました。そういえば三年前の夏に初めての本を出して以来、毎年八月に本を出しています。全著作の半分以上が八月発売……こう書くと、奇妙な縁を感じますね。夏に相応しい、活力に満ちたお話を書く作家でありたいものです。

【電撃文庫作品】

十三番目のアリス

十三番目のアリス②

十三番目のアリス③

十三番目のアリス④

俺の妹がこんなに可愛いわけがない

イラスト:かんざきひろ

イラストレーター兼アニメーター。1978年生まれ。本業の傍ら、海外でレコードをリリースするなど音楽活動もこなす何でも屋状態の変な緑色の生物。
HP <http://nekomimi.tabgraphics.under.jp/>



カバー／旭印刷